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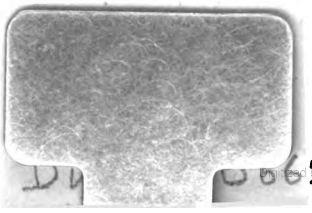
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ZOFLOYA;

OR,

THE MOOR:

A ROMANCE

OF THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

BY

CHARLOTTE DACRE,

BETTER KNOWN AS

ROSA MATILDA,

AUTHOR OF THE NUN OF ST. OMERS, HOURS OF SOLITUDE, &c.

VOL. II.

These shall the fury passions tear——

COLLINS.

——Let me not let pass
Occasion which now smiles, behold alone
The woman, opportune to all attempts——

MILTON.

LONDON:

PRINTED FOR LONGMAN, HURST, REES, AND ORME,
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ZOFLOYA;

OR,

THE MOOR.

CHAP. XIII.

At an early hour the following morning, Leonardo awakened, and immediately repaired to the garden, to enter upon his self-allotted task. While in the mansion of Zappi, he had obtained considerable knowledge with respect to gardening, from having, at leisure hours, resorted to it as an amusement; Signor Zappi likewise felt pleasure in giving him instructions, because he himself passed much

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of his time in botanising, in planting, and trying various experiments upon the fecund earth. The young Leonardo had additional motives to strengthen his perseverance; for he felt, though he should in reality reap the benefit of his own exertions, that he laid himself under no obligations to be again (bitter reflection!) reproached with them; he repaid, by the service he rendered, the benefit he received; his proud heart was therefore at rest, and his spirit became even buoyant with pleasing anticipations that banished for a time the recollection of his real woes—woes no less real, because his peculiar sentiments (whether romantic, or otherwise) induced him to prefer their pressure to the ease and splendor which he would have deemed disgrace and infamy.

Nothing assuredly calms the mind like a settled purpose. Leonardo had determined

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mined to persevere (while circumstances should render it expedient) in a course of labor and activity. Each successive day brought with it lighter, because more habitual toil, with an increase of pleasure to his heart, in the conviction of being no idle member of society. In his knowledge, superior to that of Hugo, the poor Nina soon discerned a multiplied advantage; every thing flourished beneath his fostering hand and excellent arrangement: his mind, warm and enthusiastic, slackened not in the pursuit of his object; he became gradually enamoured of his peaceful, innocent, and industrious life—his humble retirement, and total seclusion from the world. He felt no want, he received no favor; he beheld the little store of the aged Nina daily increasing, and, while he experienced the sweet reward of constant employ, his heart bounded, for the first time, with the exulting

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consciousness of being useful to a fellow-creature.

He anticipated the future, however, with a feeling of melancholy. His uncertain destination occasionally employed his thoughts—"Can I always remain thus?" he would exclaim. "Alas! No. Yet, surely, these are halcyon days; but still I have an unquenched sentiment in my soul, that tells me, this for ever (though in itself laudable) would be but an inglorious life for the heir of Loredani!" —"What," said I, "the *heir* of Loredani is disgraced! He may be happy, he may be honored in the *shade*, but despised, contemned, if he offers to emerge in the betraying light of day!—No, no, Loredani; the world is no place for *thee*, in thine own character; never mayest thou appear among men!"

These

These reflections sometimes overwhelmed his mind with gloom. He had then no refuge but in redoubled activity, resolving to allow himself no leisure for useless anticipation of future fate.

It happened however, one morning, that the aged Nina complained of an unwonted sensation; towards noon it amounted to indisposition, and Leonardo, whom she had ever called her son, assisted her to her bed, from which she was doomed never more to arise. Of this, in a few hours, the worthy creature became conscious; she felt undeniable symptoms of approaching dissolution, and knew them for what they were. "Alas!" said she feebly to the youth Leonardo, "I feel, my beloved, my second son, that I have not long to survive my dear Hugo; let me behold thy sweet

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face in the moment of death, and let me bless thee with my last breath."

Leonardo was deeply affected; he beheld, on the point of departing for ever, her who had admitted him unhesitatingly, beneath her humble roof, to a share of her little comforts, to the disposition of her trifling all. True, the event had *rewarded* her kindness, but that was not the consideration of the moment, of her genuine hospitality—could he then forsake her lonely pillow? No longer than to procure every assistance, every necessary that might contribute to her ease, or tend, perhaps, to revive the feeble embers, yet lingering, of life. But vain were his attentions, vain his endeavours; ere long extinct became every hope. After some hours of painful watching by her bed-side, during which she had not

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not spoken, and her breath had been heard to fluctuate, she, in a low and almost inarticulate voice, desired Leonardo to raise her in his arms. He obeyed with tender anxiety. "All I have is thine," she murmured, making an effort to open her eyes, and fix upon him her last look. No sooner had she beheld that ingenuous countenance, then her wishes seemed fulfilled; her head sunk heavy on his bosom, and she expired in his arms with the serenity of a child.

Great was the grief of Leonardo: he summoned her few friends and neighbours, who occupied here and there a cottage on the mountain, to perform the last sad offices for his humble but affectionate friend; and, feeling now the inutility of remaining on the spot, he resolved to defer his departure only till he

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had seen her decently consigned to the earth.

In a few days, therefore, Leonardo dividing her slight possessions among those who had obeyed his call at her decease, and reserving to himself only a trifling sum of money, the produce of his own labor since he had resided beneath her roof, he left the simple cottage where he had passed some happy hours, and, furnished with a small stock of provisions, once more renewed his wanderings. Of shelter for the night he was no longer solicitous, for his late toil, and regular healthful habits, had so far increased his hardihood and vigor, that he no longer shrunk at reposing in the open air; nor would he, he resolved, while possessed of sufficient for half a meal, attempt to enter the habitation of man.

Night

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Night at length overtook him; he threw himself carelessly upon the earth and began to reflect. The vagueness of his own intentions, the desultoriness of his mode of life, forcibly struck him.—"It is now two years and three months," thought he, "since I left my native city of Venice—since I left the disgraced abode of my father—that dear, that tender father, who so much loved me. Since that, I have been once accused of the most dreadful crimes, and driven with ignominy from the shelter to which I had no claim; then have I been inured to poverty and toil, and earned my bread, like the meanest peasant, by the sweat of my brow; now am I again an outcast on the wide expanse of creation, no friend, no home, nor a prospect of obtaining bread for to-morrow's subsistence: Oh, mother! and all this for *thee*," he exclaimed, clasping his hands fervently together; "through

thee have I endured all this." Now the probable fate of that mother, how his father had supported her loss, and the situation of his sister, with a thousand dear and tender recollections, pressed upon his mind; the fond wish of revisiting his home flashed across his mind, but scarcely at first would he admit the idea. Irresistibly, however, it hung around his heart. "And why not, then," said he, at length, in an eager voice, "why not?" as he contemplated the alteration of his appearance: "who, in the present hardy Leonardo, (robust by toil, embrowned by the fierce rays of the mid-day sun, and habited too in the coarse costume of the humble peasant,) shall trace the once luxurious heir of Loredani? Yes, I am determined," he pursued, starting on his feet; "I may with safety, without danger of being known, once more revisit my home; I can satisfy my mind respecting

ing my unfortunate family, and then take of it an eternal adieu."

He walked rapidly a few steps, forgetting, in the enthusiasm of the moment, that it was night: at length he grew calm. "Early in the morning, then," said he, mentally; "meantime here is my bed." Once more he cast himself upon the earth, and sleep stealing over him, soon calmed the agitation of his mind.

Prompt was the decision, and prompt ever the execution of Leonardo: leaving, at early dawn, the mountains of Tuscany behind him, he pursued his journey with the most eager rapidity that his humble means would allow, ever cautious that no one should suspect him for other than he appeared. Who can describe his sensations when he found himself even near the city of Venice! yet he resolved not

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to enter it during the day; and when he arrived at Padua, determined to proceed as far as he could on foot, thinking by this means that it would be impossible for him to reach Venice before nightfall.

Curbing his impatience, therefore, after taking some slight refreshment, he deliberately set out on his allotted task; but, notwithstanding that he walked, as he conceived, at a moderate pace, by the time he reached the extremity of the Terra Firma, he perceived the sun still far above the western hemisphere: he continued therefore slowly to wander along the borders of the lake, idly stopping to remark whatever villa or splendid domain attracted his eye, of which the Venetian nobility have many on the Terra Firma. At length, however, feeling somewhat weary, he threw himself upon the bed of the earth, to him no longer unfamiliar as such,

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such, and fell as usual into a train of thought. Tears involuntarily filled his eyes, and coursed each other down his cheeks: he closed those eyes, filled as they were with tears, and ruminated over the sorrows of his youth. Ah! tears, painful as you were, as yet rising from an unpolluted heart; from a heart, though bursting with grief, yet unstained by guilt. Why, why must it so soon become changed, destroyed, and plunged into an abyss of shame and infamy? Why art thou doomed, Leonardo, to add another blot to the page which registers Laurina's crimes?

Nature will often become exhausted by the intenseness of its own sensations. Leonardo sunk by degrees from keen feeling into a temporary insensibility; a soft sleep stole over his faculties, and he forgot for a time the unhappiness of his situation.

While

While unconsciously he thus reposed, a female chanced to wander near the spot. She had quitted her house for the purpose of enjoying more fully the *fresco* of the evening, and to stroll along the banks of the lake; the young Leonardo, however, arrested her attention, and she softly approached to contemplate him—his hands were clasped over his head, and on his cheek, where the hand of health had planted her brown-red rose, the pearly gems of his tears still hung—his auburn hair sported in graceful curls about his forehead and temples, agitated by the passing breeze—his vermeil lips were half open, and disclosed his polished teeth—his bosom, which he had uncovered to admit the refreshing air, remained disclosed, and contrasted by its snowy whiteness the animated hue of his complexion.

Beautiful and fascinating, though in the simple

simple garb of a peasant, did the wondering female consider the youth before her. Struck with lively admiration, she knew not how to quit the spot, when an insect suddenly alighting on his cheek, he started and awaked—somewhat confused, he hastily arose, for the female that met his eyes appeared to him supremely beautiful; approaching him gently, and with a smile, she laid her hand upon his arm, and in a gentle voice said:

"You appear a stranger here; and though your dress bespeaks inferiority of situation, pardon me if I distrust what it seems meant to convey. Without therefore deeming me impertinently curious, allow me to inquire whither you intend to bend your course, as the evening is already far advanced, and I know not of any house near this that could yield you accommodation for the night."

This

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This was the first beautiful and attractive female (save the innocent Amamia, whose attraction too was of a nature wholly different to that of hers before him) who had ever addressed herself to the warm imagination of Leonardo. His cheeks became suffused with deepening blushes, and his eyes, with which he longed to gaze upon her, were yet cast bashfully towards the earth. In a faultering voice he replied, while every consideration but of the object before him vanished from his mind:

"I have——no, I have not any particular destination for this night, Signora—but I have—I have it in contemplation where to bend my course soon; at least I am solicitous—" He stopped, unable to proceed from a confusion of idea.

"Well, but then," in a voice of tender anxiety,

anxiety, answered Megalena Strozzi (for her it was who addressed the youth), "if you are not absolutely decided—if you are not particularly desirous of proceeding further to-night, perhaps you will for the present deign to enter my villa, and allow me the happiness of offering you a dwelling for the night."

Leonardo raised his eyes, and was about to reply. "Come, I perceive you will not deny me," gaily resumed the fair Florentine, taking him lightly by the arm, and leading him onwards; "my house is but a small distance from hence: look, you may behold it as you stand," (she added) pointing with her finger to a small and beautiful edifice built in the form of a pavilion.—"Impossible, lovely Signora, to refuse *you* any thing," said the youth, enthusiastic at her charms, and the gracefulness of her manner: "impossible to refuse *you* any thing."

The

The fair Florentine only smiled, and proceeded with alacrity, as though apprehensive that the youth should retract. They soon reached the villa, and a smothered sigh, as he entered it, was the last tribute paid to the memory of his neglected home.

The character of Megalena Strozzi has already been so far revealed, that to amplify upon it here, or the excesses into which it perpetually hurried her, would be vain. Suffice it to say, that, enraptured with the novel graces of the young Leonardo, she spared no artifice or allurement to induce him to protract his stay beneath her roof. She devoted herself to fascinate and seduce him, and day after day contrived fresh causes to prevent his departure. By degrees these artifices, as Megalena had hoped they would, became unnecessary: it was now him who forbore to press the subject, who sought excuses to

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to remain, and who constantly trembled, lest the necessity of departing should be pointed out to him. It was not with the beautiful Megalena, as with the profligate wife of Zappi; for, though equally depraved herself, she knew better how to disguise, beneath an artificial delicacy and refinement, the tumultuous wishes of her heart. It was not vainly, then, that she sought to seduce the imagination, and lure the senses of the youth. No; he had in his own high-wrought feelings, in his susceptible soul, powerful and treacherous advocates in her cause. He beheld her with a mixed sentiment of admiration and passion, far different to the sentiments with which he had regarded the young Amamia. Those he had entertained for her were innocent, peaceful, and refined; for Megalena, turbulent, painful, wild: *her* charms kindled his soul; Amamia's had filled it with a halcyon tenderness: his

his sensations for the one were like the burning heat of a fierce meridian sun; for the other, like the gentle calmness of a summer eve.

Megalena, who had only retired to the villa which she at present occupied, with the intent to remain there for a few days, (and that merely on account of a slight quarrel that she had had with Conte Berenza, wherein she had bitterly reproached him for the infrequency of his visits to her,) now forgetting the cause of chagrin that had induced her to leave Venice, found herself, from the delightful chance that had introduced Leonardo to her, inclined to protract her stay far beyond what she had originally intended.

It so happened, that about this time Berenza had recovered his beloved Victoria; the absence, therefore, of the fair Megalena

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Megalena remained not only unnoticed, but unknown; while she secretly congratulated herself upon the revenge she believed herself to be taking upon the indifference of Berenza towards her; yet, indifferent as he was, the Florentine could not forget that she had loved him once with a passion almost equal to that which she now felt for Leonardo: and whether or not he still continued to repay her diminished regards with all the ardent gratitude she had the vanity to conceive her due for having *once* preferred him to all other men, she vowed in her heart that the hour in which she should discover in *him* a preference to another should be the last of his existence.

Yet for her own conduct she had no standard but her wishes. Inconstancy and duplicity towards him, from whom she presumed to require such implicit devotion,

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devotion, were esteemed as nothing: *her* excesses, her irregularities, if she had ingenuity enough to conceal them from his knowledge, she considered perfectly allowable, and far from affording to Berenza a sufficient excuse for attaching himself elsewhere.

With these sentiments she gave unbounded latitude to her passion for Leonardo, and to such an excess did it speedily arrive, that she almost felt as if for him she could resign every other man.

CHAP.

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CHAP. XIV.

THREE months had now elapsed since Leonardo, fatally for himself, had become known to the syren Megalena. He was not yet nineteen; Megalena was his senior by several years; yet so far had her full-blown but unfaded charms, her playful yet elegant manners, her various seductive blandishments, obtained the ascendancy over his imagination, that the bare idea of separating from her became to him at length distraction: she had bewitched and enslaved his heart, she had awakened his soul to new existence; the image of the delicate Amamia faded from his mind, and a more wild, a more unbounded passion

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sion took possession of it, in the form of Megalena.

With a novel delight, superior to aught she had ever felt at any former conquest, did the artful Florentine behold her triumph: she had sown (as she believed) the first germs of love and passion in a pure youthful breast; she had seen those germs shoot forth and expand beneath the fervid rays of her influence, and she enjoyed the fruits with a voluptuous pleasure.

At length however the vanity of her sex became predominant: assured of the perfect regard of Leonardo, enamoured of his beauty, and proud of her conquest, she had yet another feeling to gratify; she longed to exhibit him at Venice, to the females of her acquaintance, to excite their envy and their admiration, for of their

their attractions she entertained no fear; no dread of rivalry with herself had the haughty Florentine. But how to conceal from Berenza her new and highly prized lover—she resolved then to let her return to Venice remain a secret to him, and, in order to maintain it such, go but little from home; this point determined on, she expressed to Leonardo her desire to revisit Venice.

At the mention of Venice he became visibly agitated; the colour forsook his cheeks, and returned to them again with deepened dye. That very event which he had a little time before so eagerly desired, he now contemplated with mingled sensations of terror and reluctance. But could he refuse aught to his seducing mistress? Impossible! for her he forgot the firmest purpose of his soul; to her he laid open the painful secret, which till

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now, with scrupulous care, a high mindedness that shrunk from the idea of divulgement, he had undeviatingly guarded —the secret of his name and family.

Throwing himself into the arms of Megalena, he acknowledged himself for what he was, and hesitatingly expressed his unwillingness openly to revisit Venice, at least in his proper character.

"Are you then," exclaimed Megalena, (the fire of increased exultation sparkling in her eyes), "are you then the son of Loredani?"

"I am, beautiful Strozzi," answered he; "but," dropping on his knees, and fervently clasping his hands together, "guard, guard, I beseech you, the secret which your charms have extracted from me; respect my honor, my happiness, and

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and my life; and never, by any chance, oh, never let it transpire from your lips, that I am the disgraced, the wandering offspring of that unhappy house; or that, to the name of Leonardo I add,"—his voice faltered—" I add that of *Loredani!*"

" Never, never," solemnly answered the Florentine.

" Swear it! lovely woman—swear it, ere I rise," passionately added Leonardo.

" I *swear*, solemnly swear," answered Megalena, laying one hand upon his shoulder and raising the other to heaven, " I swear never to divulge thy secret to mortal being, and in the moment I forget my oath, may the lightning of heaven blast me!"

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"Megalena, I thank thee," cried Leonardo fervently, rising from his knees, and embracing her with a tender solemnity, while tears trembled in his eyes, "I earnestly thank thee; for the discovery of my secret I would never survive!"

"But you will go to Venice then, Leonardo."

"Oh, Megalena, does not my father dwell there?—how, going with thee, might I remain concealed from his knowledge?"

"Know you not then, dear youth, that the Marchese is no more! That event, and those which followed, are sufficiently known in Venice, and none of your family at present reside there."

Leonardo heard only the words, "The Marchese is no more!" His hands were raised

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raised in mute anguish to heaven, the eloquent tears rolled slowly down his cheeks, and emphatically he exclaimed, "Merciful God, I *thank* thee!" Then turning towards Megalena, he said, in a voice of assumed calmness, "Inform me of what you know; I can bear to listen."

The Florentine, appearing deeply affected at the visible emotion of Leonardo, stated (and certainly with all possible regard to those high and susceptible feelings which she perceived in him,) whatever had come to her knowledge respecting the occurrences in the family of Loredani. She concluded her detail, (which she had rendered as concise and as little painful as possible,) by again observing (as she believed justly) that no part of that family resided now in the city of Venice.

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"Oh, lost—oh, miserable mother!" silently ejaculated the youth; "thou hast completed, then, the measure of thy crimes: adieu, for ever, to the honor, to the happiness of thy children; thou hast now blasted them irretrievably!"

To Megalena, however, his smarting pride, his anguished feelings, suffered him to make no remark; his heart was too full, it was too towering, even in its humility, to ask a sharer in such griefs.

"And wilt thou not, then, accompany me to the city?" interrogated Megalena again, taking his hand, and looking fondly in his face.

"Yes, yes, fair Megalena," he replied, passing his hand hastily across his forehead, as if to chase away every uneasy thought;

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thought; "yes, I can *now* do any thing—but, remember, I am only Leonardo."

Delighted to have gained her point, the Florentine promised obedience to his smallest desire; anticipated, and entered warmly into his every wish, arranging with eager facility a plan for his remaining concealed, and unknown. Leonardo, yielding to all she proposed, hastened from her presence to wander awhile in gloomy retrospection; for his mind, incapable of recovering immediately from the shock it had sustained, required, in solitude, to wear off its effect, and conquer the gloom that oppressed it.

Megalena, however, determined that her lover should not retract, resumed, as soon as she again beheld him, the subject nearest her heart, and fixed the following day for their departure from the villa

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Aqua Dolce, to whose friendly seclusion she considered herself indebted for pleasure, beyond any she had ever enjoyed.

Accordingly, in the cool of the evening, on the following day, they embarked for Venice. It began to get dusk as they arrived; they soon reached her luxurious residence, but nothing could remove the oppression which momentarily had been growing upon Leonardo, increasing at every step that brought him nearer to the place of his nativity. Megalena perceiving this, exerted herself, by every tender assiduity and insinuating art, to lighten and disperse. She welcomed the youthful lover to her home, and caused a splendid supper to be prepared. At length her powerful influence began to prevail; the melancholy of Leonardo gave way before it; potent goblets of wine assisted her efforts; the uselessness of regret

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gret becoming manifest to his mind, it was displaced by a vivacity, resulting rather from the animation imparted to the spirits, by wine and luxurious viands, than the sober reasoning of philosophy. The bland seductress Megalena possessed over him an unlimited power; she had caused a new world to open on his view; even yet he was not awakened from the dream of pleasure with which she had bewitched his soul: feelings and ideas, unknown before, swelled in his bosom, and his heart was rapidly becoming immersed in an infatuating sea of voluptuousness.

Megalena, to his heated enthusiastic fancy, appeared an angel, at once beneficent and beautiful. Jealous of every idea that was not directed to herself, she sedulously endeavoured to banish from his mind all painful recurrence to the past; to this end, she thought it expedient to

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seek for him amusement and recreation, but of a nature that should not involve publicity; for, in his determination of concealment, Leonardo continued firm, and tremblingly alive to the remotest idea of discovery.

Accordingly, at her own house Megalena assembled most of her female friends, and such of her male acquaintance who, while from vacancy they affected to admire her, professed not to be lovers: to all these she presented her cherished lover as a young Florentine, and distant relation of her own; for even Megalena, bold and unprincipled as she was, did not desire to have known the real circumstances of her acquaintance with Leonardo.

Among the visitors that frequented this abode of levity and ignoble pleasure, it was not probable that any should be found who

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who had formerly visited at the Marchese Loredani's; yet, had such an accident occurred, nearly three years of absence from Venice, joined to the life which he had led amid the mountains of Tuscany, had so far changed his originally delicate appearance, that it would have been almost impossible for any but a near relative to recognise the pampered boy, Leonardo, in the hardy and robust-looking Florentine, increased to the most elegant stature of the full-grown man. But yet, although unknown and undiscovered, Megalena vainly flattered herself in believing that the tale of his relationship to herself was credited. Enamoured as she appeared of the eminent beauty of his person, and evidently incapable of remaining at ease if for a moment he quitted her presence, it required no singular degree of penetration to discern, that ties more tender and more animated than those resulting

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from consanguinity attracted her towards him.

It so happened, that among the females, to which the vanity of the Florentine incited her to introduce her lover, was one, by name Theresa. This girl was of exquisite beauty, but deeply immersed in a stream of vice and dissipation. To the further disgrace of Megalena, it must be acknowledged, that she was in a high degree accessary to her fall from virtue: the unfortunate girl (though she appeared to court her society, and to entertain towards her, friendship and affection,) was in her heart deeply sensible of this, and, when reflection transiently pervaded her wretched mind, in the bitterness of an abhorrent half-repentant spirit, she silently cursed the enemy that had betrayed her.

Soon

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Soon her penetrating and observant eye remarked the fond expression of regard with which Megalena Strozzi so frequently regarded her lover; the concealed exultation with which she viewed him, was discovered by the watchful Theresa; she felt convinced in her mind, that he bore no relationship to her, excepting that of love, (if love it might be termed,) and rejoiced at a prospect of obtaining revenge for the misery that an envying and fallen female had induced her to partake of. Inspired, too, by something of passion for the attractive Leonardo, she resolved, if possible, to detach him wholly from her hated associate, by courting him to herself. Eager in the prosecution of this plan, she left untried no artifices that could facilitate it; she invited Megalena frequently to her house, and, spite of her watchfulness and care, contrived to have her attention engaged, that she might steal

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steal Leonardo from her side, and hold private conferences with him; she appealed, as the Florentine had done, to his imagination and his senses; and by younger, therefore more blooming charms, sought to reduce his heart from its allegiance to her. But while Theresa angled, as she thought, thus securely and unsuspected, the demon of jealousy had taken possession of the Florentine's soul! Enraged to madness at what she saw, yet wily and apparently cool, with vengeance burning in her breast, she resolved still to appear unconscious, and see how far the daring treachery of Theresa would carry her. To this end, she forbore to circumvent her various plans to inveigle her lover; and, while Theresa believed herself wholly unobserved, she only fell the readier into the snare which was laid for her.

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At length her incessant and evident assiduities began to attract, in return, the attentions of Leonardo. Now no longer diffident, no longer retiring, he sought not to repress the sensations she excited —sensations not so ardent indeed, because no longer new, as those he had experienced for Megalena, but yet gradually acquiring strength, and, from the novelty of the object, at least increasing in allurement. His eyes and his language began to assure Theresa that she had in some measure atchieved her anxiously-desired object. Desirous, if possible, to rivet him at once her own, she, with eager and ill-concealed delight, appointed an evening when, by a plan of her own suggestion, he might, unsuspected, steal to her house. The sentiments of Leonardo, though high, and tremblingly alive to whatever regarded his pride or dignity of birth, were not yet so punctilious as to shrink

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shrink from the idea of infringing on the fidelity of love. Unused, even from childhood, to curb the slightest of his wishes, and his self-love flattered by the early acquired regard of so young and lovely a female, he hesitated not in accepting her invitation, though his native delicacy taught him to consider it as somewhat premature. But what then? Megalena herself had first inspired him with a taste for ignoble pleasures, and it could scarcely be dishonorable to pursue with another the path her fascinations had pointed out.

The evening then was mutually agreed on, and even the very hour fixed: to this length did the secure and artful Strozzi permit every thing to advance. Leonardo was suffered to make his escape, to enter the house, and even the apartment where his impatient fair one awaited to

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to receive him; but then so well, so accurately had the Florentine arranged her plan, she burst upon them like a thunder cloud. For a few moments she even surveyed them, but with that kind of horrible tranquillity that betokens an approaching storm.

Theresa had greeted Leonardo with a fervent embrace, and such was still their attitude. With a look, wherein was depicted the blackest rage, the deepest vengeance, and the bitterest scorn, without advancing a step, she continued to contemplate them; then, firmly and deliberately approaching Leonardo, she seized him by the arm. So unimpaired was her power over his soul, such was the awe, almost the terror, which he involuntarily felt, while sinking abashed beneath the powerful glance of her eye, that he had no power to resist the decisiveness of her action.

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action. There was a something at this juncture, in their relative situations, that made her, even in his own eyes, appear the injured person, and himself the worthless aggressor. Without a single rebellious struggle, therefore, on his side, the Florentine retained his arm, which she grasped with the violence of smothered rage; then, casting on the trembling and foiled Theresa a look, which spoke volumes to her trembling soul, she led, with step haughty and indignant, her recovered captive from the room.

Returning homewards, Megalena preserved a gloomy silence; Leonardo essayed twice or thrice to speak, but his tongue refused its office, and accents, half formed, quivered on his lips. Shocked and repentant, his mind suggested nothing that could allay the resentment he knew was boiling in the breast of his mistress. At

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At length they reached home, and entered an apartment: the Florentine still preserving an uninterrupted silence, threw herself upon a sopha, and, covering her face with her hands, remained apparently absorbed in thought.

Leonardo could bear no longer this terrible demeanor; he became agonised: the remembrance of the happiness he had till now enjoyed with his still adored Megalena, rushed impetuously over his ardent soul. Of Theresa he knew little or nothing; he felt an emotion, bordering on rage and disgust, rising in his bosom against her, for having, even momentarily, alienated his thoughts from her to whom fondly he conceived that he owed so much. No longer master of himself, he rushed towards her; he threw himself with violence at her feet, kissed them, and bedewed them with his tears. This was

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was only what the artful Florentine had expected; knowing well the haughtiness of his nature, yet knowing likewise well the susceptibility of his feelings, she had forborne to irritate, by reproach, him who was to be conquered by an appeal to the heart.

"Oh! lovely, oh! adored Megalena," cried the repentant lover, "forgive, forgive me. I feel, yes, I feel that 'tis you alone I love; pardon then, in this conviction, your unhappy, guilty slave!"

The Florentine answered not.

"What! not a word, not a word. Oh! Megalena," resumed he, almost distracted, and snatching his stiletto forth, "I have lived too long then, and thus let me force existence from my worthless, though agonised heart." As he spoke, he tore open

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open his vest, and franticly made an attempt to plunge it in his bosom.

Megalena, starting up, wrenched it from his furious grasp, and threw it far. Still the devoted youth remained at her feet. She cast her eyes downwards upon his graceful form, and tenfold love assailed her softened soul. She stretched forth her hand and bade him rise. Her voice re-animated him, and, springing up, he folded her with ardor to his breast.

The artful Strozzi returned his embrace, but suddenly pushing him from her, she exclaimed:

"Go, bring me that stiletto?" He felt surprise, but obeyed her imperious command.

She took it hastily from his hand, then said in a solemn serious voice:

"Leonardo,

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"Leonardo, do you *love* me?"

"*Love* you!" he eagerly repeated.

"Then, mark me," she resumed, "by this stiletto, and by *your* hand, Theresa dies!"

The youth shuddered, and recoiled a few steps; for human nature shrinks instinctively at murder.

"Ah! false wretch! do you hesitate?" fiercely exclaimed the Florentine; "go then! go to your Theresa, and quit my sight for ever!"

"And will nothing less then appease thee, oh Megalena!" faltered out the enslaved Leonardo.

"'Tis plain he *loves* her," gloomily muttered the vindictive Strozzi.

"Oh!

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"Oh! no, by Heaven I do not!" eagerly replied Leonardo.

"*Prove* it then, by plunging this stiletto in her heart! nought else can, or shall, convince me that you do not."

"Oh! Megalena, my first, my only mistress! you will not, you cannot surely require proof so dreadful!"—and implor-ingly he looked in her countenance.

That fierce countenance still retained its unchanging expression—in it he read, "*Consent*, or *leave* me!"—This dreadful fiat made her appear, from the apprehen-sion it excited of losing her, more beau-tiful then ever in his eyes. Her symmetri-cal form shone forth with redoubled love-liness to his heated fancy, and, while he gazed, his struggles died away, or were displaced by sensations which overpow-ered

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ered them.————He stretched forth his burning hand; it trembled with the consciousness of intended murder; and, in a faint faltering voice, he said—

"Give me the dagger!"

"You *consent* then, said the seductress Megalena, "to let it shed the blood of the insolent Venetian."

"I do——I do—"

"And to bring it me again, stained and dripping with her gore!"

"All—all—you require!" groaned the miserable Leonardo. "I love you—cruel Megalena—oh! how much—when, to prove it, I would murder——"

The Florentine cast the stiletto with violence

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violence away, and opened her fair arms wide. The bewildered Leonardo rushed into their embrace, and sunk overpowered on her bosom!

"I forgive thee," she cried; "I *now* forgive thee, Leonardo! I wanted, after thy cruel dereliction from me, some proof that I was still loved——that proof I have obtained, and thou art mine again!"

"Oh! I was thine ever," replied the infatuated youth, tears gushing from his eyes.

"I now believe that thou wert," answered the Florentine, gazing exultingly upon her victim, and then gently seating him beside her with a smile.

Such was the *fatal* empire that a worthless wanton had acquired over a

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young and susceptible heart, left to its wild energies, ere reason could preponderate; and thus darkly coloured became the future character of one, yielding progressively to the most horrible crimes, which, if differently directed in early youth, might have become an honor and an ornament to human nature.

CHAP.

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CHAP. XV.

MEGALENA STROZZI, from this instance of the envy and treachery of female acquaintance, became disgusted with Venice, and resolved to retire again to her villa near the banks of the lake, that she might retain her captive in solitary safety. Having but rarely quitted her house during her stay at Venice, and even then avoiding the most public resorts, she had, as she desired, escaped the observation of Count Berenza, who indeed, had he chanced to have espied her, would have been more anxious to shun, than recognise her. Venice, however, she with Leonardo hastily quitted, and repaired to Aqua Dolce, secretly happy that she had

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borne away her lover from all further temptation, and exclusively appropriated him to herself.

For a time she remained tranquil and satisfied: she found means to diversify the scène, and amuse the youthful taste of Leonardo, by rambling about the beautiful walks that environed her dwelling, or sometimes, in her gondola, taking the fresco upon the lake. Yet, spite of all this, spite of being unceasingly in the society of him she preferred, her restless spirit could not be restrained, and again she panted for the gay pleasures of the city: *ennui* began to take possession of her ill-organized and resourceless mind; for it is the pure, *intellectual* soul alone, that can receive delight from solitude.

Venice, with all its dangers, became preferable in her eye to the gloomy sameness,

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ness, though security of the country; and, after a residence of a few weeks there, she again resolved to brave the allurements of the city. Leonardo was equally desirous with herself to emerge from seclusion, but, having now acquired artifice, he affected indifference to the proposed change. Megalena, pleased at this appearance, and flattering herself that he was now too firmly riveted to allow himself to be again seduced by the charms or incitements of others, with as great eagerness as she had flown to it, now hastened from her weary solitude.

Arrived once more in Venice, she boldly resolved that she would no more, as formerly, debar herself from going, as she had been wont to do, to the most public resort of the gay Venetians; and she even decided in her mind, that should Berenza, as fully she expected he would, question

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her with respect to the nature of her intimacy with the youth Leonardo, to impose upon him, if possible, the same story that she had attempted to pass upon others.

In consequence of these arrangements it was that she no longer withheld herself from figuring in St. Mark's Place, and on the Laguna. Leonardo, however, constantly declined accompanying her in these public exhibitions; and the artful Florentine procured him such amusements at home, as should inform her on her return how he had employed his time.

Thus it was that, on a certain evening, during one of her excursions on the lake, she encountered Berenza, whom so long she had feared to meet; but encountered him under circumstances that she had little expected. Bitter and offensive

to

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to her jealous soul was the situation in which she beheld him, with a young and lovely rival seated by his side, in gay and amorous converse; with a basilisk's eye she gazed upon her, breathing destruction and revenge.

"And is it for this, then," she exclaimed, "that I have till now so anxiously concealed myself? Well might the wretch be incurious respecting me: well he might leave me unmolested by his visits. But why? Ah, little could I guess, and dearly shall he pay, for the short-lived raptures his inconstancy has procured him."

Thus, bursting with rage, swore the vengeful Megalena; and, rushing immediately, as she entered her abode, to the apartment where she had left Leonardo employed in finishing a drawing, she

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threw herself upon a chair beside him, and exclaimed———

"Throw, throw aside your pencil, Leonardo, and seize your dagger; for, by Heaven, this night he dies!"

"What said'st thou, Megalena?" inquired the youth with evident surprise, fixing his eyes upon her countenance: "*who* is it dies to night? and what dost thou mean?"

By the rage which flamed on her cheek, and sparkled in her eye, Leonardo easily discerned that somewhat unusual had occurred. Taking her hand, and tenderly kissing it, he pursued: "Tell me, Megalena, what has befallen thee?"

"Yes, he *shall*—by all my hopes of salvation

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salvation he shall *die!*" frantically cried the vindictive Florentine; "and *thou*, Leonardo, yes, thou shalt execute my vengeance on him!"

Murder again!—the theme was still horrible to Leonardo, and again he shuddered and recoiled.

"Wilt thou not consent, Leonardo?" she said, in a hollow voice, fixing upon him her large and fiercely gleaming eyes.

"But say, *who* must die?" cried the youth, "and what is the offence against thee?"

"The treacherous, the ungrateful betrayer! But you know him not, Leonardo —yet, mark me; my resolution is taken, and it devolves on you to execute it! The time is at length come, wherein you must

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prove the strength, the devotedness of your attachment to me. Now then hear me:——Il Conte Berenza is a noble Venetian; he was the betrayer, the deceiver of my youth; to him do I owe—yes, to *him*," added the artful Florentine, "that first my soul wandered from the paths of virtue! that I am now unworthy," hiding her countenance upon the bosom of her agitated lover, "to become ever more than the mistress of my Leonardo." The heart of Leonardo become infinitely affected. Megalena proceeded: "This day I encountered him on the Laguna, accompanied by a female: he passed me by; he uttered words the most gross, the most insulting; I regarded him with horror and surprise painted in my looks; when, fearful I suppose that the mere sight of me should contaminate the purity of his present love, he rudely waved his hand, with an air of scorn and indignation, as if to say,

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say, "Impure wretch, how darest thou appear to recognise me in the presence of a superior female?—Leonardo!" she pursued, furiously starting from her chair, strung with new rage by the relation of the falsehoods she had invented—"Leonardo! shall I tamely submit to this? canst *thou* submit to it? This to *thy* mistress—it is for that he dies!—thy love has *ennobled* me, and I will not now suffer degradation tamely!"

The high susceptible feelings of Leonardo, thus artfully played upon, became enkindled: he participated in her well-feigned outraged delicacy, so flattering to his own self-love; but still the revenge was dreadful to his mind, proportioned, too, far beyond the offence.

Perceiving that, though his cheek glowed with indignation, and his eyes with ar-

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dent love, that still he spoke not, determined, then, to work him to the pitch she required, she resumed:

"Oh, Leonardo! if, in love for thee, I have outstepped the bounds of delicacy and decorum, oh! let me not, therefore," with faltering voice, she pursued, "let me not be with impunity outraged or trampled on by others!"

"No, no, no!" cried the overpowered Leonardo, raising her in his arms; "no never, sweet mistress of my soul, while I have life! He who offends thee, dies!"

"Thou art, then, thou art my own," cried the delighted Florentine; "that assurance reanimates my sinking soul. Secure now of my cherished revenge, I will discuss with thee further the steps to be pursued:

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pursued: come, my beloved Leonardo, let us go to the supper room.

Obedient to her will, Leonardo accompanied her. Seated now at supper with the machinating Florentine, she, fearful that his enthusiastic ardour might relax, pledged him repeatedly in goblets of the most potent wine; taking sufficient care, however, to elude swallowing more herself than would permit her to preserve her empire over him. As it fatally happened for Leonardo, Megalena never appeared more beautiful to him than at those times when she was urging him to the commission of some horrible evil; so that deeds, however repugnant to his nature, and the loss of her love, bore in his deluded eyes no comparison. Megalena well aware of this, by appearing in her conduct and by her language as though she considered herself to have received his

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his promise of avenging her, took from him in fact the power of refusing to do so. How to acknowledge to her, that his soul, shuddering, recoiled from the idea of murder, he knew not. From his knowledge of her disposition, he shrunk at encountering her direful rage, her bitter reproaches, and resentful looks; but more he shrunk even in thought from the possibility of her abandoning him, and, with a violent but expiring struggle, he decided in his mind to acquiesce, and give up every attempt to alter the current of events. As the fumes of the wine mounted to his brain, the reasoning of principle subsided, and the delusions of fancy increased. The Florentine became every moment more beautiful in his sight, and he began to think, that, in *her* cause, crime itself must become a virtue. She who, as she had persuaded him, seduced by her wild unconquerable love towards him,

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him, to forego and cast aside every principle of delicacy; she who had braved for him the scorn and contumely of the world; who had even this day, through him, as he conceived, endured gross insult; —no, it was no longer the representations of his lovely mistress which aroused him, but honor, justice, and gratitude. So wild and erring, in the increasing heat of intoxication, reasoned and believed the deluded Leonardo. It was now him who led to, and followed up the subject, while the exulting Megalena, by a refinement of artifice, added fuel to the fire she had excited, without appearing to do so.

At length, unable to contain the burning rage she inspired him with, he started suddenly up, and drinking down an overflowing goblet of Lacrymæ Christi, he prepared to rush from the house, without even taking the necessary precaution of a cloak

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cloak and a mask, as enforced by Megalena. For a moment she succeeded in calming him, but only to direct his furor to unerring and surer destruction. Covering his face with a mask, she armed him with a stiletto, which she took from her girdle, and covered his figure with a cloak; then, straining him in her arms, she cried, "Success attend thee!"

Strung anew by her seductive embrace, stiletto in hand, he flew from the house, to plunge the deadly weapon in the heart of a man who had never injured him—whom even he did not know. Such is the influence to be obtained by female profligacy over the warm feelings of unaided youth.

Directed by the subtle enchantress, Leonardo easily gained the pallazzo of Berenza. As it had been a night of festivity

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tivity, he found an easy access to the house, and, unobserved, into the chamber, where he concealed himself behind a wide curtain that covered a window, which, as has been said, opened into a balcony. On hearing Berenza and Victoria enter, he had stepped into it for greater security, and perceived, with no indifferent feeling, that it would, in case of necessity, afford him an opportunity of escape. There, in a state of mind bewildered, yet dreading to be reasonable, he remained till occasion seemed favorable for the execution of his purpose: the success it met with has been already related. To a hand rendered unsteady by a confused consciousness of the meditated crime, was added the intense and overpowering horror of at once recognising a sister, and burying in the same moment (as he believed) his dagger in her heart. Wild and dismayed, precipitately

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pitately he had fled, a murderer in thought, at least, if not in deed, and sought, in a state of mind inexpressible, the vile Strozzi, who, like Sin, sat expecting to hear tidings of death.

"Well," exclaimed she, starting from the restless couch where she had thrown herself, as, pale and disordered, the unhappy Leonardo rushed into the room, his mask in his hand, and his vest torn open to admit the air to his burning bosom: "Well, is it done?"

"Yes, yes, vengeance is executed upon *one* of your enemies," he cried, in hurried accents.

"Upon the false, the infamous Berenza, I hope," eagerly returned Megalena, approaching and gazing in his pallid face.

"No,

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"No, no, upon *my sister!*" gloomily answered Leonardo.

"Your sister! You rave, young coward," cried Megalena, shaking him by the arm.

"I do not—I have mortally wounded Victoria di Loredani, my sister! wounded her mortally in the arms of him, for whom my dagger was intended!"

"Thy sister, *thy* sister!" in a voice of fiend-like exultation, cried the infamous Strozzi;—yet secretly enraged that Berenza had not perished, and thrown by the furor of disappointment off her guard.—"Then Megalena Strozzi is not the *only* fallen female upon earth; no longer need she bow her head with shame to the ground—for Laurina, *mother* to the heir of Loredani! and Victoria, his *sister!* both

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both *high* and *noble* ladies, raise her to *their* level by sinking to *hers!*—Oh, this is a balm to my soul," she continued, clapping her hands with a wild laugh; "Berenza, proud and accomplished seducer! the woman who loves *thee* may sacrifice to thee her innocence and her fame; but thou wilt never sacrifice to *her* thy liberty, or grant her thy *honorable* love!"—Thus continued the unfeeling Florentine, wreaking upon the wretched Leonardo the avenging scorpions of her tongue, for having failed in the precise purport of his dreadful mission. This was the first time, since their ill-advised union, that she had ventured to breathe aught concerning, much less taunt him with the agonising secret of his family misfortunes! His high soul sickened and shrunk within him at allusions so barbarous: for an instant he regarded with horror the infamous Strozzi; he essayed to speak, but could not,

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not, and, overpowered with violent and conflicting emotions, he fell postrate on the floor.

It was then Megalena began to think, and even admitted the conviction, that she had proceeded too far; she almost feared that, by the inhuman stab she had given to the high feelings of the youth, she had destroyed for ever in his heart every particle of love for herself. This reflection served in an instant to change the tenor of her conduct: from the malice of rage and disappointment, she softened to the suggestions of her interest, which whispered to her, that in losing now the regards and future devotement of Leonardo, upon which she calculated much, she should lose her all.

Throwing herself beside him, therefore, she passionately implored his forgiveness, and

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and sought, by the repetition of every well-tried artifice, to soothe and alleviate the agonising tumult she had excited. By degrees her blandishments began to prevail over the infatuated youth; and even the horrible recollections she had awakened in his mind, of his being in reality a disgraced and wandering outcast, drew him but more closely to *her*, who, knowing him for what he was, still loved, and took an interest in his fate. He adored her, though she had wounded him to the soul, and, when to her caresses and ardent professions of eternal attachment she solicited some reply, he raised her in his arms, as kneeling she bent over him, and, pressing her with violent emotion to his bosom, passionately cried:

"Megalena, I am thine *still*——yes, I feel that I am, and shall be so *for ever!*—Oh, lovely and seducing woman, eternal must

must thy empire be over me; and, if I forsake thee, may the curse of Heaven light upon my head!"

"Then," cried the Florentine, delighted at the strength and solemnity of this assurance, "let us from this moment be eternally devoted to each other! let us *swear*, that nor time, accident, nor circumstance, shall *ever* disunite us!"

"I swear," answered Leonardo ardently; "I swear it again;" and kissed with rapture the extended hand of Megalena.

"Receive too *my* oath of perpetual allegiance to *thee*, loved youth," with ardour, exclaimed the Florentine, "for I solemnly swear to be ever true, and devoted to thee. "Now then," she added more calmly, "let all past differences be

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be buried in oblivion, and the more material circumstances of the moment obtain our consideration."

Seating herself beside Leonardo, she then desired a minuter detail of the occurrences of the night; when suddenly, in the midst of his relation, she missed the dagger which she had given to him! Her high-flushed cheek became immediately blanched by terror, and eagerly she interrupted him to ask him concerning it. In an instant the recollection flashed upon his mind, that, in endeavouring to recover his mask, he had never thought of retrieving his dagger likewise, which he did not even remember to have drawn from the bosom of Victoria, where fully he believed himself to have plunged it. Such had been the horror and agitation of his mind, he could retrace nothing distinctly; yet the dagger unquestionably was left behind

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behind, and this was enough to distract the Florentine.

Gasping for breath, "We are undone!" she cried, "we are betrayed; for on the hilt of *that* dagger is engraved, at full length, the name of "Megalena Strozzi!"

Leonardo was silent, for he dreaded the reproaches which he almost felt he merited.

Suddenly recovering, however, her presence of mind, she exclaimed: "We must fly, we must fly instantly; the night is not yet spent; before day-break we may be far from this detested city. To some future period must I defer the completion of my just revenge!—You tremble, young man; but let us hope," she added with a horrible smile, "that you will not

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always be thus dismayed at the thought of blood;—why, Leonardo, thou art not half a Venetian!"

"Am I not, Megalena? When occasion calls, I can prove myself one; but I feel that, were I even abject by blood, and in my heart, that *thou* couldst render me equal to any thing." Still, as he spoke, his eyes refused to meet the unshrinking gaze of the Florentine.

"We shall fly then together, beloved Leonardo," said she, "and I shall not so much regret our enforced departure from this gay city; for, now to be frank with thee, my love, my resources diminish daily: this place affords me no longer the exhaustless mine I once imagined it would; the Venetians have become wary, or can it be, that *I* am changed from beauty

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beauty to deformity? Be it as it may, we will quit it unreluctantly, and let us hope that elsewhere better fortune may be ours."

Though some parts of Megalena's speech had surprised Leonardo, he forbore (unwilling to diminish her fascinations in his own eyes,) to require more ample explanation; he took her hand hastily, and said——

"I will follow thee, fair Megalena, wheresoever thou wilt, even unto the end of my life, as we have mutually sworn."

Smiles of pleasure chased from the brow of the Florentine the gloomy traces of rage, and unsatisfied revenge; she looked upon her lover with eyes of gratitude, and ardent affection: he was indeed become her all, her sole depend-

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ance in the plans of her future life; for, vicious, profligate, and unsteady, though still not past the zenith of her charms, they were deemed so far from counterbalancing the violent passions which deformed her mind, that she had but few admirers among the jealous and suspicious Venetians.

She now hastened from the room to make every preparation for an immediate flight: in less then two hours, she had gathered together all the valuables she possessed, and which were capable of being taken with them—every requisite was arranged, and the grey eye of the morning beheld them far from Venice.

Unhappy Laurina! whose criminal desertion of thine offspring entailed upon them such misery and degradation. In this early career of their lives, behold the guilt

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guilt and unworthiness for which thou art amenable. Yet, darker still, and disfigured by greater crimes, will be the days which are to come. Faultless example would have shamed into efforts of virtue, the proud and violent nature of thy daughter; yet behold her now, without even a remorseful struggle, abandoning its precepts. Thy son, the dark hue of his character decided, the slave of an artful worthless wanton, who presumes, and justly presumes, to call herself *thy equal!* while, through a terrible and unforeseen combination of events, he has been on the eve of becoming the murderer of his sister!—Tremble, unfortunate and guilty mother, for longer and more gloomy becomes the register of thy crimes!

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CHAP. XVI.

THE letter, which was written by Megalena Strozzi, and which, from an obscure spot in the island of Capri, she had caused to be conveyed to Berenza, has been already given at full in a preceding part of this history; and was received, as stated, about a fortnight after the mutual flight of Leonardo and herself, well knowing that pursuit must then be vain, and (from the precautions they had taken) to trace their route impossible. Still undetermined where eventually to fix, but resolving to be guided by circumstances respecting their future plans, we must now, for a considerable length of time, leave

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leave them, and return to the thread of our narrative.

Youth, and that strength of mind which precluded hypochondriac malady, did not permit Victoria to languish long under the effects of her wound; she grew rapidly convalescent, but, during her inevitable confinement, external objects not intervening much to distract her regards by flattering her vanity, she had full leisure to concentrate her great and varied powers into one point—that of rendering herself an object of such moment to her lover, that he should consider, with horror, the bare possibility of losing her, and be anxious to bind her more completely his, by ties esteemed indissoluble.

But such had already been the effect produced upon Berenza, by conduct

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which he could not help considering proof of the most heroic love, as well as courage; that he no longer viewed her with tender passion only, but with the strongest sentiments of gratitude and enthusiastic admiration.

What could woman more, than voluntarily, nay eagerly, oppose her own life in defence of his? Who but Victoria could possess, at once, such tender and such exalted sentiments towards a lover? Longer to doubt the truth, the romantic ardour of her attachment, would, he esteemed, be sacrilege; his ideas underwent a wonderful, but natural revolution—no more the haughty Berenza, proud of his noble, his unsullied blood, fearing to dash it with a tincture of disgrace!—no more looking *down*, with protecting air, a high and superior being, upon a mistress beloved indeed, but not considered as an *equal*,

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equal, because, though innocent in reality, in his eyes she was a scion of infamy and shame;—no, his heart now throbbed with excessive tenderness, and now ached with compunctious pangs, that he could ever have deemed unworthy of his honorable love the creature before him, shining superior in a glory emanating from *herself!*—the creature to whom he now thought himself inferior! So complete and powerful a dominion had the act of Victoria obtained over his mind, that his *proud* and dignified attachment, softened into a doating and idolatrous love. He was no longer the refined, the calculating philosopher, but the yielding devoted lover! devoted to the excess of his passion. In short, he felt that *now*, to be happy, to conciliate his conscience, and to atone to Victoria for his past injustice, he must make her his wife.

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No sooner had he formed this resolution, than he believed himself to have discovered a balm for every thing, and to experience a pure sensation of delight till now unknown. Unable long to contend against the strong impulse of his heart, he waited only for the re-establishment of Victoria's health, to pour out his feelings at her feet, and to offer to her the unworthy gift of himself.

When, therefore, he thought her sufficiently recovered to permit him to touch upon a subject, that must, as he supposed, occasion some emotion, he no longer withheld himself from giving utterance to what had of late so often risen from an overflowing heart to his lips. Victoria heard him with a look of complacency, and all that softness she knew so well how to assume; but pride having always kept her from surmising the struggles of Berenza

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Berenza upon her subject, and that he had not till this period offered to become her *husband*, because till this period he had deemed her unworthy to become his *wife;* having never surmised this, she betrayed no immediate emotion, or unspeakable delight; no overpowering transport, or surprise; but listened to him in silence, with an acquiescent smile. This being considered by Berenza as a coolness of demeanor uncongenial to the subject, he mentally attributed it to wounded pride in Victoria that he had not *sooner* made her an offer of his hand. His own noble delicacy caught the alarm, and his liberal soul acknowledged the justice of her feeling; anxious then to remove from her mind every uneasy impression, the ardour of his manner increased, and he prayed of Victoria to pardon the unworthiness of his past scruples.

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Here Berenza erred; had he stopped at the simple intention of offering his hand to Victoria, he had done right; but his last insinuation, though broken and obscure, darted like lightning through her brain, and struck to her proud heart as a three-edged dagger! That proud heart had now indeed taken an alarm far beyond any that Berenza's imagination could have conceived. Her brow lowered, she turned of an ashy paleness, as sudden hatred and desire of revenge took possession of her vindictive soul. The conviction flashed upon her, that she had till this moment been deemed by Berenza unworthy of becoming his wife.

"The secret then is betrayed," thought she; "the sort of union into which he entered with me, and which vainly I preferred as a proof of his love for me, was desired by him only as being least offensive

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offensive to his dignity and pride——'tis well——"

Rapidly these ideas passed through the mind of Victoria; and, while secretly vowing the offence should never be forgotten, she again harmonised her features, and clothed them with smiles: since such had been the sentiments of Berenza, it now became unquestionably a desirable point to become at once his wife. To have triumphed by any means over his stern and detested pride was something, but it could not obliterate the crime of having ever dared to view her in an inferior light. Unhappy Berenza! all thy delicacy, thy forbearance, and nobleness of mind, will not save thee from the consequences of having proceeded thus far.

The changes of Victoria's countenance were only attributed by her lover to an uncon-

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unconquerable emotion, which she struggled to conceal, at this undeniable proof of the strength of his attachment to her; delicately solicitous to raise her in her own eyes, he, with pressing earnestness, entreated of her a prompt compliance to their union. Victoria fixed upon him her eyes, pregnant with an unusual expression, for busy were her evil thoughts against him.

"Why is that look, my love?" inquired Berenza.

"I look upon thee as I love thee!" answered Victoria.

"And thou wilt be mine—honorably and solemnly mine, then?" said Berenza, with eagerness.

"I will; answered Victoria—I most ardently *desire* to become thy wife."

Berenza,

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Berenza, who understood nothing by these expressions but simply what met the ear, viewed her with an increase of tenderness and admiration; for it is a principle in human nature to exalt in our *minds* those objects we are determined to favor and elevate.

A very short period from this beheld Victoria di Loredani the wife of Il Conte Berenza; and becoming so, her faults in the eyes of an admiring husband were wholly obliterated, and her better qualities appeared to shine forth with redoubled effect.

With what a different and far more refined feeling did he *now* walk with her in St. Mark's Place, or exhibit her on the Laguna, amid thousands of gay Venetians, in their gondolas. With what pleasure, with what delight, with an air how unembarrassed,

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embarrassed, did he *now* introduce, as his *wife*, to an elegant and respectable society, her whom he could have felt but a vain and inconsiderable triumph in introducing as his *mistress* to the gay and dissolute! In having made his Victoria an honorable wife, he experienced a noble and benevolent satisfaction, which had for its basis the reflection of having raised to a level with the higher class of society, her whom he might have been instrumental in sinking to that of the lowest.

But though the conduct of the refined Berenza was such as to claim and to deserve the highest gratitude and love, the vindictive spirit of Victoria could not forget that he had *once* deemed her unworthy of ranking on an equality with himself; for this, in her moments of solitude, her heart swelled with unforgiving hate: she despised and undervalued the advantages she

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she possessed, and fed the discontented repinings of her mind, by recalling to memory the moment when he unfortunately betrayed the state of his sentiments respecting her. Sometimes she even regretted that, under circumstances so humiliating, she had consented to become his wife, and almost determined to shew her contempt of his fancied condescension, by abandoning him. If at these times her unconscious husband by chance obtruded, he was received with a gloomy and discontented air, which, when he pressed her to explain, she attributed either to indisposition, or an involuntary depression of spirits.

When the mind is dissatisfied, whether upon grounds just or unjust, it ever views objects through an exaggerated medium; trifles which, when in a sane state, would have

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have passed unnoticed, are twisted from their proper insignificance, to aid the conceptions of a disturbed imagination. Thus was it with Victoria: she knew, and felt, that Berenza was her superior, and she imagined that he must feel it likewise; every word, every look, every action, she thought reproached her with her former degradation, and the abjectness from which it had pleased him to raise her. Her fits of gloom and abstraction increased; she forbore to cultivate any society, from a sentiment of most unpardonable pride—pride which, like a worm in the heart, the more it was cherished the more corroded; and the luckless Berenza was sometimes, in the momentary sting of disappointed hope, compelled to acknowledge, that though the situation of a wife might have rendered more *respectable* the object of his love, it had for ever destroyed

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stroyed the charms and fascinations of the mistress: yet still he loved her with the tenderest, the truest affection.

Five years had now rolled on since a union but little productive of real happiness to either party, when, one evening, a violent ringing at the gate of the pallazzo bespoke the approach of an impatient visitor. Soon a stranger was announced, and almost in the same moment entered the saloon. Berenza rose from his chair, but scarcely did he cast a glance towards him ere he flew into the arms that opened to receive him, exclaiming, "Welcome to Venice! welcome home, my beloved Henriquez!" Then, turning towards Victoria, as surprise and delight permitted him to recover himself, "Behold a beloved brother, my Victoria," he said; "and you, my brother, behold an adored

adored wife: now, now, indeed, may I expect to be truly happy."

Henriquez pressed the hand of his brother, and paid some graceful compliments to Victoria, who, gazing upon him with admiration, in an instant drew ungrateful comparisons between their persons, to the disadvantage of him in whom her soul should have discerned *no fault*. But that benevolent and unsuspicious being seated himself between them, and felt, as he deserved to be, truly happy.

Hitherto it has not been thought requisite to enlarge materially upon the cause that induced the departure and stay of Berenza's brother from Venice. It has been hinted, however, that it was to divert, if possible, by activity and change of scene, the ardour and impetuosity of a passion

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passion that he had conceived for a young lady, whose father had, on the plea of their mutual youth, opposed their union, but who in reality was desirous only of obtaining a higher match for the blooming Lilla, his daughter, at that period little more than thirteen years of age; for although he could not bestow upon her the smallest dowry, he conceived that the nobility of her birth entitled her to the first Duca in Venice. The circumstance of his having lately become deceased, which event Lilla, in corresponding with, had imparted to her lover, was the means of bringing him thus in anxious eagerness to Venice, fondly hoping that now every obstacle to their union was removed, which still remained the first fond wish of his bosom, undiminished by time or an absence of years; for where, as with impassioned earnestness he demanded of himself, could he ever hope to find in another that

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that purity and innocence which his heart told him still dwelt incorruptible in the bosom of his young and lovely mistress?

Berenza, to whom, during supper, he related the delighful cause of his sudden return, and dwelt with all the ardour of a lover upon the fond hope he entertained of being soon enabled to call Lilla his, fondly took pleasure in flattering him that nothing indeed was now likely to disappoint the desires of his heart. Victoria listened in silence to the conversation, and an indefinite sentiment, resembling regret, glanced through her bosom, when she thereby discovered that the affections of the young Henriquez were so deeply engaged.

At length they separated for the night: the lover to dream of the fair creature that in the morning he hoped to embrace; and the

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the disturbed Victoria to arrange, if possible, the confusion of idea that floated in her mind.

Scarcely had the first beams of morning enlightened the east, ere Henriquez awaked, ardent and impatient to visit the object of his love. Soon as propriety might in the least admit, he flew to her residence: the fair Lilla received him indeed with all the warmth, with all the affection he could have wished, but his buoyant hopes were quelled by what she said in reply to his eager solicitations to become immediately his.

Her father was indeed dead, but still impediments existed; she was under the protection of an ancient female relative, who with herself had remained with him in his last moments. It was the dying request, nay command of that father, (cruel and

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and relentless even in death,) that she should not marry till the expiration of a whole year from the time that he should be consigned to the earth. To this she had solemnly and implicitly promised obedience, and to this requisition, hard as it was, she professed to Henriquez her fixed resolution to adhere.

Educated in sentiments of the severest piety, it was in her idea a sacred and religious obligation in her to fulfil a promise to the dying; nay, she would have deemed it horrible sacrilege even to hesitate or waver respecting its performance; and all the entreaties of her lover to make her forego adherence to what he considered an arbitrary and most unjust command, were not only vain, but tended almost to shake him in her long and deep-rooted sentiments of esteem, by giving her doubts of his moral character. Little more than

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than one month had as yet elapsed, since the interment of the tyrannical parent; nearly a whole year even now must roll over their heads, ere they could become united; yet evén against this grievous representation on the side of Henriquez the pious Lilla was proof, and, with a heart nearly as agonised as if he had been compelled to resign for ever his hopes, the unhappy lover returned to his brother's pallazzo.

His first impulse was to seek him in private, and relate to him the disappointment of his wishes with Lilla. The kind Berenza listened with attentive sympathy, and it occurred to him that, since Lilla would not immediately become the wife of Henriquez, the pains of delay might be infinitely alleviated by prevailing on her to become a constant visitor at the pallazzo, which, as Berenza was now

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married, and she herself under the protection of a female relative who would always accompany her, could not certainly be in the least an objectionable alternative. This was indeed pouring balm into the wounds of Henriquez; scarcely would the eager and impassioned youth permit his brother to conclude, ere he rushed from his presence, and appeared again before his beloved Lilla, to impart to her the proposition of Berenza, and to implore her to accede to it. This the scrupulous and innocent girl offered no objection to, and the heart of her lover was once more rendered comparatively light.

On the evening of the same day she consented, accompanied by her relation, to visit Victoria; for it was under that shape alone that Henriquez had ventured to propose her seeing him at the pallazzo of

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of his brother: he then once more departed, and related to Berenza his second attempt, with the success it had met upon the conscientiousness and delicacy of his mistress.

In the evening, according to promise, the fair girl made her appearance, and was by Henriquez introduced to the Conte and to Victoria, as his destined wife: but never, ah, surely never, was unconscious guest received with feelings and with thoughts so hostile as was the innocent Lilla by Victoria! Yet still the smile played upon the disciplined features of the accomplished hypocrite, and the hand was extended to bid her welcome.

Throughout the evening her conduct was such as to excite a timid gratitude and respect in the breast of her lovely visitor, and to make her appear admirable

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in the eyes of the delighted Henriquez. Why were unreal, appearances that shed around such pure, expansive satisfaction? Dark and dreadful are the intricacies of the human heart, when debased as was Victoria's. Almost unknowing to herself, she conceived immediate hatred for the orphan Lilla, because she was dear, because she was beloved by Henriquez, and Henriquez had appeared charming in her eyes. It was the early influence of this new-born sentiment that had generated one so base, and Victoria's was not a noble and an honorable mind, that would combat in itself feelings that were improper to be indulged; rather would she have sought their gratification, unmindful of the misery that might be produced to others.

CHAP.

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CHAP. XVII.

As though the curse of Laurina were entailed upon her daughter, (that of becoming absorbed by a guilty and devouring flame, with the single exception that, in the case of the former, the heart and mind had been *involuntarity* seduced by a designing betrayer, while the other cherished and encouraged an increasing passion for one who attempted her not, and which common honor should have taught her to repel), Victoria dwelt with unrestrained delight upon the attractions of the object, that had presented itself to her fickle and ill-regulated mind. From her infancy untaught, therefore unaccustomed to subdue herself, she had no conception of that *refined* species of

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virtue which consists in self-denial; the proud triumph of mind over the weakness of the heart, she had ever been unconscious of; education had never corrected the evil propensities that were by nature hers: hence pride, stubbornness, the gratification of self, contempt and ignorance of the nobler properties of the mind, with a strong tincture of the darker passions, revenge, hate, and cruelty, made up the sum of her early character. Example, a *mother's* example, had more than corroborated every tendency to evil, and the unhappy Victoria was destitute of a single actuating principle, that might, in consideration of its guilt, deter her from the pursuit of a favorite object. Her mind, alas, was an eternal night, which the broad beam of virtue never illumined.

Henriquez was the subject of her thoughts

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thoughts by day; he employed her fancy by night; his form presented itself if she awoke; he figured in her dreams if she slumbered; daily, nay momentarily, her unchecked passion acquired strength: already she viewed with disgust, heightened by unfading remembrance of the sentiments he had once entertained respecting her, the being who had claims so strong upon her gratitude and affection.

For the young Lilla she cherished the most unprovoked and the bitterest hate; the hot breath she respired was charged with wishes for her destruction; yet each, and all of these beings, were unconscious of the feelings they inspired; for the honorable Berenza, whose mild philosophy taught him it was only just to conclude that love induced love, and proofs of esteem gratitude, regarded his wife with an unvarying tenderness. The innocent

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Lilla placed confidence in her smiles, and courteous demeanor; while Henriquez, absorbed in the contemplation of an adored mistress, remarked not the impassioned glances of another directed towards him, nor the pointed attentions by which they were at times accompanied.

Eminently indeed calculated to excite an ardent love in youth, was the mind and person of the orphan Lilla. Pure, innocent, free even from the smallest taint of a corrupt thought, was her mind; delicate, symmetrical, and of fairy-like beauty, her person so small, yet of so just proportion; sweet, expressing a seraphic serenity of soul, seemed her angelic countenance, slightly suffused with the palest hue of the virgin rose. Long flaxen hair floated over her shoulders: she might have personified (were the idea allowable) innocence in the days of her childhood. Her very

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very situation had a powerful claim upon the heart of sensibility, for the blooming Lilla was an orphan: no ostensible protector had she under the face of heaven, since an old and feeble relative, whose very existence from day to day appeared precarious, could not justly be deemed so; this very circumstance it was, that drew most powerfully towards her the benevolent soul of Berenza, and ardently he longed for the expiration of the allotted year, that she might obtain, in the arms of his brother, a safe and honorable refuge.

Time rolled on, and the effervescence of Victoria's mind increased almost to madness. Nothing but the consideration of the proposed marriage between Henriquez and Lilla being, in conformance with the religious scruples of the latter, protracted, kept her within the bounds

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of discretion, necessary even for the accomplishment of her own purpose. But as she beheld time passing away, and that still Henriquez, the idol of her thoughts, remained wholly insensible to the most open insinuations, almost avowals of the feelings he had excited, she became nearly frantic with desperation, and resolved to risk every thing to obtain her point.

The most wild and horrible ideas took possession of her brain; crimes of the deepest dye her imagination could conceive appeared as nothing, opposed to the possibility of obtaining a return of love from Henriquez. To see him, and to see him bestowing upon the envied Lilla marks of the tenderest attachment, made her wild with the furor of conflicting passions: now it was, that she truly felt she had never *loved* the injured Berenza,

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Berenza; but that circumstances, the situation of the moment, and a combination of events alone, had first induced her to attend, and ultimately to fly to him, as the only being who would afford her protection. She now viewed him as a philosophic sensualist alone, whose conduct towards her had been solely actuated by selfish motives. Was he not considerably her superior in years? It was plain, then, that his regard for her had been of the most unworthy kind, and his anxiety to ascertain her love for him, ere he took advantage of the situation into which she had thrown herself, a refinement of the grossest artifice. But Henriquez, the lovely Henriquez, was more upon an equality with her, and it was for him that the selfish Berenza should have reserved her.

Thus it was, that she ungratefully re-

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flected upon the delicate and noble conduct of the Conte towards her! forgotten all his honorable forbearance, despised his refined and disinterested attachment; and thus it is, that in the pursuance of some favorite object, the wicked depreciate the benefits they have received.

Retiring one night to her chamber, more gloomy, more repining than ever, she threw herself upon her bed, secretly wishing that Berenza, that Lilla, nay, even the whole world, (if it stood between her and the attainment of her object,) could become instantly annihilated. Her bosom ached with the exhausting conflict of the most violent passions; death and destruction entered her thoughts, and twice she started up, as impelled to execute some dreadful purpose, she knew not what! Horrible images possessed her brain, and her heart seemed

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seemed burning with an intense and unquenchable fire. She became even herself astonished, at the violence of the sensations which shook her, and for an instant believed herself under the influence of some superior and unknown power.

Transported nearly beyond the bounds of reason; almost expecting, in the wildness of her distempered fancy, to behold somewhat that should corroborate her idea, perhaps even to soothe the agony of her bosom; she started up again from her thorn-strewed pillow! But no—all was peaceful without—the rage and the confusion was in her breast! A dim light, at the further end of the chamber, emitting a few solitary rays, revealed the surrounding loneliness and gloom; she pressed her hand on her throbbing temples, her heart beat with violence; and, once

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once more overpowered, she laid her head upon her pillow.

At length she fell into a disturbed slumber; dreams of mysterious tendency began to flit in the disordered eye of sleep. First she beheld, in a beautiful and luxurious garden, Lilla and Henriquez; his arm encircled her waist, and her head reclined upon his shoulder, while he contemplated her angelic countenance with looks of ineffable love. At this vision, a deep groan broke in sleep from the miserable Victoria; she endeavoured to turn her eyes from them, but could not, and, while the most horrible and raging pains shot through her heart, they suddenly disappeared from before her, and she found herself alone, in a remote part of the garden. Presently she beheld, approaching towards her, a group of shadowy figures; they

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they appeared to hover in mid air, but at no great distance from the earth, and, as they came nearer, she discerned, that though of a deadly paleness, their features were beautiful and serene. These passed gradually; when, as if from the midst of them, she beheld advancing a Moor, of a noble and majestic form. He was clad in a habit of white and gold; on his head he wore a white turban, which sparkled with emeralds, and was surmounted by a waving feather of green; his arms and legs, which were bare, were encircled with the finest oriental pearl; he wore a collar of gold round his throat, and his ears were decorated with gold rings of an enormous size.

Victoria contemplated this figure with an inexplicable awe, and, as she gazed, he bent his knee, and extended his arms towards her. While in this attitude, her mind

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mind filled with terror, she looked upon him with dread, and essaying to fly, she stumbled and awoke.

Reflecting on her dream, she could attribute it only to the disturbed state of her mind; and, desirous if possible to forget for a few moments her pain, she again endeavoured to sleep.

Scarcely had thought become again suspended, ere fancy took the lead; she now saw herself in a church brilliantly illuminated, when, horrible to her eyes, approaching the altar near which she stood, appeared Lilla, led by Henriquez and attired as a bride! In the instant that their hands were about to be joined, the Moor she had beheld in her preceding dream appeared to start between them, and beckoned her towards him; involuntarily she drew near him, and touched his hand, when

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when Berenza stood at her side, and seizing her arm, endeavoured to pull her away. "Wilt thou be mine?" in a hurried voice whispered the Moor in her ear, "and none then shall oppose thee." But Victoria hesitated, and cast her eyes upon Henriquez: the Moor stepped back, and again the hand of Henriquez became joined with Lilla's. "Wilt thou be mine?" exclaimed the Moor in a loud voice, "and the marriage shall *not be!*"—"Oh, yes, yes!" eagerly cried Victoria, overcome by intense horror at the thoughts of their union.——In an instant *she* occupied the place of Lilla; and Lilla, no longer the blooming maid, but a pallid spectre, fled shrieking through the aisles of the church, while Berenza, suddenly wounded by an invisible hand, sunk covered with blood at the foot of the altar! Exultation filled the bosom of Victoria; she attempted to take the hand of Henriquez;

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riquez; but casting her eyes upon him, she beheld him changed to a frightful skeleton, and in terror awoke!

Her mind was now in a chaos of agitation and horror, from which she found it difficult to recover; endeavouring, however, by a violent effort to recall her scattered ideas, and to resume her usual firmness, she became collected enough to review the leading features of her dream.

The image which, upon this review, presented itself most forcibly to her mental vision, was that of the Moor, whose person she had a confused idea of having seen frequently before. After a minute's reflection, she identified him for Zofloya, the servant of Henriquez. Why *he* should be connected with her dreams, who never entered her mind when waking, she could not divine: but certain it was, that his exact

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exact resemblance, though as it were of polished and superior appearance, had figured chiefly in her troubled sight. She next reverted to the terrible moment in which she beheld joined the hands of Lilla and Henriquez, but that Zofloya had offered to prevent the marriage. On this incident she pondered with a sensation of pleasure, and Berenza, bleeding and dying at her feet, she contemplated as a blissful omen of her success. The more she considered, the more she inferred, the less reason she perceived for interpreting ill the visions of the night; and the conclusion which at length she drew was this, that every barrier to the gratification of her wishes would ultimately be destroyed, and that she should at length obtain Henriquez: all else she considered as irrevalent to the true purport of her dream, and the fantastic ebullitions of a disturbed mind. The frequent

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quent introduction of Zofloya she judged to be merely in consequence of her beholding him daily, sometimes attending behind the chair of his master at meal times, and on other occasions; while Henriquez, changing to a skeleton when she obtained his hand, was emblematic only, she conceived, that he would be hers till death.

The following day, when at a late hour she entered the apartment where they usually dined, the first object that caught her attention was the tall, commanding figure of the Moor, standing near the chair of his master; she almost started as she beheld him, and, the image in her dreams flashing upon her mind, she marked how exact was the similitude, in form, in features, and in dress. She seated herself, however, at the table, but involuntarily stole frequent glances towards him: once

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once or twice she imagined that he looked upon her with a peculiar expression of countenance, and strange, incongruous ideas shot through her brain; ideas which, even to herself, were indefinable. She became at length gloomy and abstracted, from mere incapacity to develope her own sensations; but to be gloomy and abstracted, had of late ceased in her to become remarkable; and, while the excellent Berenza in secret deplored this change in his beloved Victoria, he forbore the slightest reproach, endeavouring only, by the kindest and most delicate attentions, to disperse her frequent melancholy: the innocent Lilla too, with gentle sweetness, would sometimes approach, and seek, by endearment or lively converse, to remove what was so evident to all.

But the efforts of the lovely girl appeared rather to injure than to benefit Victoria; they roused her from her dejection

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jection indeed, but excited strong irritability, and feelings of the bitterest nature. Solitude in general seemed to delight her most; and, as she had denied to Berenza that she possessed any definable cause of melancholy, in that he permitted her to indulge; hoping, unsuspicious of the evil in her heart, that her mind, by its own efforts, would recover its tone.

As for Henriquez, though he treated her with friendship and respect, as the wife of his brother, he did no more: first, because he was absorbed in Lilla; and, secondly, because being so completely, both in mind and person, the reverse of that pure and delicate being, he not only failed to view them as two creatures of the same class, but almost thought of Victoria with a tincture of dislike, from the very circumstance of her being so opposite to his lovely mistress.

CHAP.

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CHAP. XVIII.

THE Moor, Zofloya, was beloved by all, save one, in the pallazzo of Berenza; this single exception of the general sentiment was discernible in a man called Latoni, a domestic who had resided for some years in the service of the Conte: envy and hatred filled his heart in contemplating the superior qualities of Zofloya, whose elegant person was his least recommendation. He could dance with inimitable grace, and his skill in music was such, that in excursions on the Laguna he frequently, at the request of his master, occupied one end of the gondola, to charm the company with the exquisiteness of his harmony. These rare distinctions, and the estimation in which

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which the Moor was held by his superiors, so preyed upon the mind of Latoni, that he abhorred to look upon him, and sought every occasion to irritate him, that, in some quarrel or fight, he might do him a mortal injury. The Moor, however, disdaining Latoni, treated him with sovereign contempt, and no bitterness of language could extort from him other reply than a smile of most expressive scorn. This behaviour would enrage Latoni to a pitch of madness, but not daring to wreak his vengeance upon so universal a favorite, he had no alternative but to rush from the spot, and vent in curses the malignant fury of his breast.

It happened that, some few days after the singular dreams of Victoria, while their impression and their tendency still occupied her mind, that the Moor, Zofloya, became suddenly missing! As he was

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so highly prized by Henriquez, and admired by all, this circumstance caused infinite consternation throughout the pallazzo; and none indeed did it affect more strongly (most inconceivably to herself) than Victoria. Every place that he had ever been in the habit of frequenting, where even there was the remotest probability of his having been, was scrupulously sought, and referred to; people were sent different ways, throughout Venice, to gain, if possible, some intelligence respecting him; but all in vain.—Several days elapsed, and not the smallest tidings could be obtained.

Conjecture at length became weary, and hope began to fail; all further attempts to learn the fate of Zofloya were considered to be vain, and time alone was expected to develope the mysterious circumstances of his sudden disappear-

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ance. In the midst of this, the domestic Latoni was seized with sickness, and confined to his bed. Berenza, who regarded him as an old and faithful servant, used every endeavour to promote his recovery; but his disorder rapidly gaining ground, the physicians confessed the inability of medicine to save him from approaching death. This final opinion being conveyed to Latoni, he was seized with the most terrible pangs, from which he only recovered to entreat the presence of a confessor, his master, and Signor Henriquez, ere he resigned his breath.

This request of a dying man, the benevolent Berenza readily complied with; Henriquez likewise consented to accompany him, and Victoria, she knew not why, begged permission to be present. All together, then, entered the chamber of the expiring Latoni, who, soon as he beheld

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beheld them, raising himself in his bed, spoke as follows:

"My Lord Berenza, and you Signor Henriquez, execrate not a dying penitent, but listen with mercy and forgiveness to his confession. It is I, Latoni, who know all concerning the disappearance of the Moor Zofloya. *I* envied his beauty, his accomplishments, and hated him for the admiration which they obtained him. I sought many opportunities of provoking him to quarrel with me, but he treated me with contempt, and this increasing my rage against him, determined me to take his life!"

"Wretch!" exclaimed Victoria.

"Signora, peace, I beseech you, for I must be brief; and the pangs I

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now endure, may almost expiate my crime———

" One evening, the evening he was missing——I followed him from the pallazzo; I watched his footsteps, but kept at a distance. I observed him on St. Mark's; my heart panted with uncontrollable fury, and desire of vengeance, for the bitter moments he had given me.——I saw him raise his eyes to heaven, and contemplate the spangled sky—he stood almost close to the brink, over the canal, and I longed to push him in headlong; but the idea that this might not effect completely his destruction, and that he might save himself by expert swimming, stayed my eager hand, and softly I approached him from behind.———He heard me not.—I took, trembling with fear of failure, my dagger from my belt, and plunged it repeatedly into

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into his back, ere he could even attempt to defend himself; I then, satisfied that he must perish, tumbled him into the water, from which he never rose, and hastily fled the spot!——An avenging conscience pursued me however, and prevented me from enjoying the fruits of my crime; death approaches, and the torments of Hell are open to my view."

As Latoni concluded, strong convulsions seized him, and he fell back upon his pillow. His confession had eased his conscience, but could not prolong his life. He lingered a few hours, then praying for mercy, though almost despairing to obtain it, he breathed his last.

Great was the grief of Victoria on hearing, thus circumstantially detailed, the

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loss and destruction of one who had began so deeply to interest her thoughts. She found it impossible to account for the degree of feeling which affected her; she had never been conscious of the slightest predelictiòn in favor of the Moor, and, till the circumstance of his impressing her mind from appearing in her dreams, had never even cast a thought more than common upon him. From that period, indeed, she had been most inexplicably interested about him, nor could she for any length of time banish his idea from her mind.

It was vain, therefore, that she essayed to feel indifferent to the reflection of his unhappy fate; she found it impossible, and experienced a weight at her heart, as if under the impression of having sustained a heavy loss.

Zofloya,

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Zofloya, though a Moor, and by a combination of events, and the chance of war, (in the final victory of the Spaniards over the Moors of Granada,) reduced to a menial situation, was yet of noble birth, of the race of the Abdoulrahmans. He had, after severe vicissitudes, when still young, fallen into the hands of a Spanish nobleman, who, pitying his misfortunes, considered him rather as a friend than an inferior, and bestowed high polish upon the education he had received. Henriquez having become acquainted with this nobleman during his travels, to divert the sorrows of his love, he formed with him a strict friendship, founded, in some degree, upon similiarity of situation as well as sentiment. Unfortunately, however, in the height of their friendship, the Spaniard became involved in a quarrel, which terminated in bloodshed. He received a wound, which was pro-

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nounced to be mortal, and Henriquez had the melancholy office of attending a friend in his dying moments: at this awful period it was, that he, among other changes, recommended to his future protection the Moor Zofloya. Henriquez promised implicit observance to all his wishes, and Zofloya was in consequence taken immediately, after the death of his first master and protector, into the service and guardianship of Henriquez.

These peculiar circumstances, besides his excellent and ingenuous nature, considerably endeared the Moor to him, and he loved him not only for the sake of his departed friend, but for his intrinsic worth as well. His loss, therefore, by Henriquez, was most sensibly and deeply regretted, and the confirmation of his frightful death received with sentiments of acute grief.

Nine

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Nine days had now elapsed since the death of Latoni; nothing had as yet been heard to contradict his dying account of the end of Zofloya, when, to the surprise of every one, on the evening of the tenth, he entered the apartment where the family of Berenza were assembled! All started from their seats, and Victoria, overcome with mixed emotions, sunk into hers again; an explanation of his astonishing and unlooked for return was hastily demanded by his master, when, gracefully bowing, the Moor gave of himself the following account:

"Of the cause of Latoni's hatred towards me I am wholly unconscious; he frequently sought my life, and on the night that he followed me with murderous intent, and wounded me repeatedly with his stiletto, I discerned whose hand aimed

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the blows, but was not empowered to make effectual resistance, being, as it happened, wholly unarmed. I struggled with the base assassin, however; but not aware of his intentions, he pushed me, faint as I was with loss of blood, over the edge of the steps on which I was standing when he first attacked me, into the canal below. Here, undoubtedly, I must have perished, but that an honest fisherman, returning to Padua, was the means of my preservation, by extricating me from the water, assisted by the feeble struggles for life that I was yet enabled to make. Fortunately, none of my wounds proved to be serious; and being in possession of a secret transmitted to me by my ancestors, for speedily healing even the most dangerous ones, I remained at the hut of the fisherman till I was perfectly recovered, and enabled once more

to

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to present myself before the honorable family to whom I owe my highest gratitude and respect."

Here ended the narration of Zofloya, who, when he had received the congratulations of every one upon his miraculous escape from destruction, appeared to learn with evident surprise the death of Latoni. He demonstrated, however, visible joy at the intelligence, and returning thanks, submissive yet dignified, for the kindness manifested towards him, respectfully withdrew from the apartment, casting, as he went, a look of the most animated gratitude upon Victoria, as though his *heart* thanked her for the interest she had appeared to take in his story, beyond what his respect would permit him to express.

As for Victoria, in proportion as she

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had been miserable at the disappearance of the Moor, in so much was she rejoiced to behold him again. Her heart dilated with an unaccountable delight, with which the image of Henriquez was deeply connected; for she thought of him with less of jealous agony, and more of confidence and hope, as though, strange as it appeared, the mere presence of Zofloya possessed a secret charm to facilitate her wishes. This idea gave an animation to her countenance, and a flow to her spirits, that for some time had not been perceptible in her. The change delighted the unsuspicious Berenza, who flattered himself that it was the dawning triumph of vigorous reason, over the morbid refinements of a sickly fancy. The innocent Lilla, too, caressed her with heartfelt pleasure, and Victoria returned her caresses with a gloomy eagerness, as the murderer might be tempted to fondle the beauty of the

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the babe, whose life he intended to take. Henriquez, always participating in the pleasures and sorrows of his mistress, paid too a more than usual attention to Victoria; but it was an attention in compliment to Lilla, to a brother whom he loved, and not the spontaneous effusions of his heart to her.

On this night Victoria retired to bed with feelings of delight, that teemed with woe to others. Hers was not that innocent vivacity which springs at once from the *purity* and *sanity* of the heart; it was the wild and frightful mirth of a tyrant, who condemns his subjects to the torture, that he may laugh at their agonies; it was the brilliant glare of the terrible volcano, pregnant even in its beauty with destruction!

Scarcely had her head reclined upon her

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her pillow, ere the image of Zofloya swam in her sight; she slumbered, and he haunted her dreams; sometimes she wandered with him over beds of flowers, sometimes over craggy rocks, sometimes in fields of the brightest verdure, sometimes over burning sands, tottering on the ridge of some huge precipice, while the angry waters waved in the abyss below. Often the circumstances were so strong, that the bounds of fancy contained them no longer, and, hastily awaking, scarcely could she assure herself that Zofloya stood not at the side of her bed! At one time the delusion was so strong, that she even fancied, after gazing for a minute at least, that he was a few paces from her bed, and that she saw him turn, and walk slow and majestically towards the door. At this, being no longer able to resist, she started up, and called him by his name; but as she did so, he seemed to vanish through

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through the door, which still remained shut. Surprised, she passed her hand over her eyes, and looked round the chamber; all was lonely, she beheld no further traces of his figure, and, difficult as was the persuasion, she endeavoured to believe the whole a delusive dream.

At length, she laid down, and closed her eyes again; the weariness of sleep oppressed her to such a degree as to deprive her wholly of motion, but, notwithstanding this, her eyes half opened involuntarily. A grey silvery mist filled the chamber, shedding a sort of twilight; the curtains at the foot of her bed opened wide, and in the same spot again stood the figure of Zofloya! With one hand he seemed to hold Berenza, whose countenance, of pallid hue, seemed convulsed in the agonies of death. On his bare bosom appeared large marks of livid blue, and

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and his eyes stretched wide, gazed mournfully upon the oppressed Victoria. In his other hand, the Moor held, by her beautiful and flaxen tresses, the orphan Lilla; her thin and spectral form seemed arrayed in transparent shade, her lovely head drooped, and on one side of it was seen a deep wound, from which the blood had streamed adown her aërial robes. While still incapable of volition, Victoria gazed, Berenza and Lilla vanished back, and she beheld instead, her own likeness and that of Henriquez stand on either side of the Moor. She seemed to stretch forth her arms, into which Henriquez appeared impelled, but hastily retreating, she saw that his bosom was disfigured by a dreadful wound. Suddenly, Berenza and Lilla again drew nigh; resplendent wings, which dazzled her eyes, came from the shoulders of Lilla; with a seraphic smile she extended her hands to Berenza

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renza and Henriquez, and rising with them from the ground, Victoria beheld them no longer; her heart beat violently, her brain throbbed, and, essaying to rise, she found herself no longer incapable of motion.

CHAP.

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CHAP. XIX.

VICTORIA having passed a night of restlessness and agitation, fell into a slumber towards morning, from which she did not awaken till late in the afternoon. When she entered the saloon to join the family at dinner, her eyes irresistibly fixed upon the figure of Zofloya, who flew with alacrity to procure her a seat; during dinner she was silent and abstracted, and her regard continued involuntarily to turn towards him. In one of those hasty glances which pride would alone permit her to steal, it occurred to her that the figure of the Moor possessed a grace and majesty which she had never before remarked; his face too seemed animated with charms till now unnoticed, and his very

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very dress to have acquired a more splendid, tasteful, and elegant appearance.—True it was, that great was the beauty of Zofloya; to a form the most attractive and symmetrical, though of superior height, deriving every advantage too from the graceful costume of his dress, was added a countenance, spite of its colour, endowed with the finest possible expression. His eyes, brilliant and large, sparkled with inexpressible fire; his nose and mouth were elegantly formed, and when he smiled, the assemblage of his features displayed a beauty that delighted and surprised. But still, to the present period, all this had been unnoticed by Victoria: the oftener she looked towards him, the more her astonishment increased that it should have been so, and she could not help thinking that Zofloya, before his sudden disappearance, and Zofloya, since his

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his return, were widely different of each other.

Whenever she cast her eyes upon the Moor, she could perceive that he observed her; and not observed her only, but regarded her with a tender, serious interest, that filled her soul with a troubled sort of delight. At times she even thought he looked at her with a peculiar earnestness and animation, yet her pride felt no alarm; but, on the contrary, she took pleasure in knowing that he gazed upon her. His place was near the chair of Henriquez, yet was he assiduous in attending to her: in every motion he displayed some new grace, and in the eyes of the vain Victoria his beauty increased every moment.

For this once, though Henriquez was in her mind and in her soul, another occupied

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cupied her attention, and in spite of every attempt to divert it to other objects, on that one (as if by the irresistible force of magnetic attraction) it perpetually turned. To relieve herself from an indefinable oppression, she soon rose from table, and wandered into the garden: there, throwing herself on a seat, she began to brood over her criminal passion, and the wildest thoughts rioted for pre-eminence in her brain.

"Detestable Berenza!" she suddenly exclaimed, inspired by the basest hatred and ingratitude towards him. "Detestable Berenza, selfish and unworthy wretch, that played upon my youth, and deluded me into the misfortune of becoming thy wife! had it not been for thee, and thy cursed arts, Henriquez ere now would have been mine. The baby, Lilla, I would have banished from his heart; I would have rooted

rooted her thence, or from the earth! but, that my energies are all enslaved, my powers fettered, by the hated name of wife, Henriquez should have yielded to my love; he should not have yielded only, but have gloried in it. Who is the minion, Lilla? A friendless upstart! *she* was no obstacle; I think not of her: detestable Berenza! I say again—mean, calculating philosopher, it is thou——thou that I should wish annihilated!" As she concluded, a faint echo seemed to repeat her last words, in a low, hollow tone, as if sounding at a distance, and borne by the wind.

"What was that?" said Victoria, mentally; but the sounds returned not—— "Ah, it was some mockery," she pursued, while a deep sigh burst from her guilty bosom! She drew her hand mechanically across her eyes for a moment, and as she removed

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removed it, she beheld Zofloya standing, though at a respectful distance, before her. Surprise, accompanied by an emotion of anger, lightened through her mind, that an inferior should thus presume to intrude upon her retirement: this latter sentiment, however, faded in an instant before the majestic presence of the Moor; she looked upon him with an anxious air, but did not speak, and observed that in his hand he carried a bouquet of roses.

"Beautiful Signora!" he said in a gentle voice; and gracefully inclining his body, "pardon me that thus I venture to appear uncalled before you; but these roses I gathered for you; suffer me to strew them at your feet." So saying, he attempted to scatter them before her.

"Zofloya!" cried Victoria, while her eyes wandered with admiration over the beauty

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beauty of his form, "no—you shall not strew them at my feet; give them to me, and let me place them in my bosom."

"There are too many for your bosom, sweet Signora! but I will select you some, and of the rest I will form you a carpet." He took the choicest rose from the bouquet, and strewed the remainder at the feet of Victoria: then, extending his hand, he presented to her the rose which he had selected.

Victoria stretched forth her hand to receive it; when, as she did so, a thorn ran deep into one of her fingers, and the blood issued in a large drop. Zofloya, in apparent consternation, opened his vest, and, tearing some linen from his bosom, cast himself upon his knees, and applied it with trembling eagerness to the wound. Victoria felt too surprised—almost gratified

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fied to repulse him, and the Moor continued, unchecked, to press the blood from her finger, and to absorb it with the linen, as it flowed. At length it ceased to do so: Zofloya pressed the crimsoned linen to his heart, and tearing from it every particle that remained unstained, he folded it up as a sacred relic, and placed it in his bosom. Then seeming suddenly to recollect himself, he appeared struck with confusion at his own audacity: he dared not raise his eyes to Victoria; and a dark-red blush animated with lurid colour his expressive countenance.

Victoria, feeling irresistibly impelled, laid her hand upon his shoulder, and in gentle voice said, "Rise, Zofloya, and be not ashamed, for you have not done aught amiss."

"Say *you* so, Signora? I rise then with

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confidence;" and, rising as he spoke, he humbly retreated a few paces from her.

"But, why, Zofloya," inquired Victoria, with a smile, "have you deemed that piece of linen worthy preservation?"

"Worthy, lovely Signora!" answered the Moor, raising his fine eyes to her countenance, and crossing his arms upon his bosom; "it is of more worth to me than language can describe; it is of equal value to me with yourself, for it is a part of you—your precious blood! chary will I be of it; and, safely placed upon my bosom, no earthly power shall tempt me to resign it." As he concluded, his countenance glowed with a brilliant fire, and increased animation spread itself over his graceful form.

The vanity of Victoria was flattered: in

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in no guise did she disdain flattery; but was astonished at herself, however, that with such disparity of situation, it should be sweet to her. She desired to banish all hostile reflection; and, gazing upon the attractive Moor, she saw such unconquerable fascination, that her eyes sought the ground, as fearful to express the conscious emotion of her bosom.

"Wherefore, Zofloya," she involuntarily said in a tremulous voice, "do you remain at such a distance?"

"*May* I then approach, Signora?"

"You may."

The Moor drew nigh; but, as Victoria still remained in a recumbent attitude, he seated himself upon the earth, at her feet.

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An oppressive gloom now took possession of the mind of Victoria; a weight of misery seemed pressing on her heart, and, covering her face with her hands, she heaved a deep sigh.

"You sigh, sweet Signora!" said the Moor, in a sympathising accent; "may Zofloya venture to demand the cause?"

"The cause, Zofloya——Ah! it is a cause which you cannot remove; it is a wound for which there is no balm."

"Not so, perhaps, Signora."

There was little in the words of Zofloya to excite hope in the bosom of Victoria; yet enlivening hope shot through her bosom, and she half rose from her reclining attitude.

"Zofloya,"

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"Zofloya," she said, in a doubting accent, finding that he did not proceed, "what hope could *you* offer me?"

"Some, perhaps, Signora—name your grief."

She started wildly from her seat—— "Moor!" she exclaimed, "your words are big with meaning; they contain more than meets the ear! Quick, and tell me, boldly, all you would say."

Zofloya rose from the ground: he presumed to take the hand of Victoria, and led her again to her seat; in a moment she was calm.—"Now, Signora, deign to acknowledge to me what secret oppresses, and has for long oppressed your soul; the Moor, Zofloya, may repay you for your confidence."

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The secret of Victoria hovered on her lips; hitherto it had remained unknown to mortal soul; in the gloomy solitude of her own perturbed bosom, had she till now preserved it, where, like a poisonous worm, it had continued to corrode. She was now on the point of betraying her inmost thoughts, her dearest wishes, her dark repinings, and hopeless desires; of betraying them, too, to an inferior and an infidel! The idea was scarcely endurable, and she scorned it; but, in the next instant, she cast her eyes upon the noble presence of the Moor: he appeared not only the superior of his race, but of a superior order of beings. Her struggles died away, and, in hurried accents, she involuntarily exclaimed——"Oh, Henriquez! Henriquez!"

The Moor smiled——

"Why

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"Why dost thou smile, Zofloya?" cried Victoria, with momentary indignation.

"You love Henriquez, Signora."

"Yes, yes—to madness!——to distraction!——how canst thou smile, unfeeling Moor?"

"Are you not a holy catholic, Signora?—yet to love so much an earthly being——"

"Mock me not at this moment, Zofloya; for *that* being I would forfeit my hopes of heaven! You smile again; I perceive I have condescended too far; you dare to make sport of my miseries?"

"No, no, beautiful Signora; I smile only at your innocence."

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"*My* innocence!" she repeated with surprise; for conscience whispered *that* long since had fled.

"Yes, Signora, at your innocence; that, in the midst of wishes so consuming, could not instruct you to obtain them."

"Oh say——Can *you* instruct me? can you arrange? can you direct the confused suggestions of my brain?"

"I think I could *assist* you, fair Signora!"

"Oh, Zofloya, you would bind me for ever to you!" eagerly exclaimed Victoria.

"Enough, lovely Signora! To-morrow, at the dusk of the evening, deign to meet me again here. I see approaching towards us, Il Conte Berenza and Signor Henriquez."

"Ah!

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"Ah! I see them too—the hated Berenza," she said; while stronger loathing against him took possession of her heart.

"Farewel, Signora, till to-morrow," said Zofloya; and precipitately leaving the arbour, he took a contrary path to that in which Berenza and Henriquez were advancing.

Victoria continued, with indescribable sensations, to gaze after his graceful figure, as it disappeared from her view; then reluctantly leaving the arbour, she joined the Conte and Henriquez. With tremulous delight, and with feelings of diminished pain, she stole frequent glances at the unconscious possessor of her soul: he observed her not; for the blooming Lilla was hastening towards them. In an instant he quitted the side of Victoria, and flew towards her: at this sight hate kin-

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dled fiercer than ever in the bosom of Victoria; she regarded the lovely orphan with the eyes of a basilisk, and wished that, like them, they possessed the power to destroy. Vain this evening were the mild endearments of Lilla: she repulsed them with haughtiness; for the feelings in her bosom raged too strong to permit the assumption of kindness, and she experienced, that, however her conversation with Zofloya might have imparted hope, and have soothed in a degree the anguish of her mind, still it had increased, to the highest point of irritability, every violent and bitter sensation.

CHAP.

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CHAP. XX.

SCARCELY, on the following evening, had the artificial shades of twilight increased the gigantic outlines of the far-seen mountains, ere Victoria hastened to the spot where the Moor, Zofloya, had said he would await her. On her arrival, she found him already there, and on perceiving her, he hastened forward.

"Be seated, fair Signora," he said, respectfully leading her to a sloping bank, overshadowed by a spreading acacia.

Victoria obeyed; the manner of Zofloya was such as inspired involuntary awe: he took his station beside her.

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The soul of Victoria was a stranger to fear, yet uncommon sensations filled her bosom, as she observed her proximity to the Moor. The dim twilight increasing to darkness, which now began to spread its sombre shadows around, threw a deeper tint over his figure, and his countenance was more strongly contrasted by the snow white turban which encircled his brows, and by the large bracelets of pearl upon his arms and legs. Yet his form and attitude, as he sat beside her, was majestic, and solemnly beautiful—not the beauty which may be freely admired, but acknowledged with sensations awful and indescribable.

"Signora," he began, in an harmonious voice, while every uneasy feeling of Victoria's bosom vanished as he spoke—"I am not to learn that dreadful oppression of soul weighs you to the earth;

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earth; but the cause of your unhappiness I desire to hear from your own lips, more explicitly than you have yet acknowledged it. Think not, beautiful Victoria, that, in the spirit of idle curiosity merely, I would dive into the recesses of your bosom; no, it is from a hope I entertain, that I possess a power equal, almost to my wishes, of alleviating the sorrows you endure. But even should I not possess that power, even then there is a delight, of which you will speedily become sensible, in confiding them to a sympathising breast."

Victoria hesitated—the Moor proceeded:

"Does the Signora believe, then, that the Moor Zofloya hath a heart dark as his countenance? Ah! Signora, judge ye

ye not by appearances! but, if you desire relief, make me at once the depositary of your soul's conflicts, and trust to the event."

Scarce had Zofloya opened his lips, ere uneasiness, as we have said, vanished from the mind of Victoria. As he proceeded, the most agreeable sensations fluttered through her frame, and in her brain floated fascinating visions of future bliss, that passed too rapidly to be identified. Scarce had his silver tones sunk on her ear in thrilling cadence, than she felt even eager to express to the Moor her inmost thoughts: excessive, yet confused pleasure, filled her heart—she looked upon his still discernible, though darkened figure; upon his countenance, where, like two diamonds, revealed by the force of their own casual rays, his eyes

eyes emitted sparks of lambent flame.—Involuntarily softened towards him, she said—

"Whether or not thou canst assist me, Zofloya, is unknown to me; but, feeling strongly impelled to reveal to thee every movement of my soul—the fatal, I almost fear, the remediless cause of my misery, I hasten to acknowledge to thee all. I have already hinted to thee concerning my love; although the wife of Conte Berenza, my inmost soul doats frantically upon the young Henriquez; to complete my hopeless distraction, the orphan Lilla, that presumptuous and dependant intruder, hath for long been in possession of his heart, an heart of which she knows not the value, for her person is not more puerile than her mind. But, it is not the artful insignificant ascendancy this girl has acquired over him that bids me despair; it

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it is—it is that I am wedded to a wretch whom I abhor!—who stands between me and happiness, and who was only sent upon this earth to seal the fiat of my miseries. Were I but once freed—freed from those hated fetters that bind me to Berenza, I would soon drive from the superior mind of Henriquez the silly passion which now occupies it; I would make him feel that he was destined to nobler fate, to confer and to receive the highest happiness; not merely to yield himself a sacrifice to the undiscriminating fancy of his boyish days. Oh, Zofloya! this would I do, were opportunity allowed me—but never, oh, never will such bliss be mine!"

She leaned her head upon her hand, and paused; then quickly resuming: "I have now told thee of the agony which racks my breast; I have even revealed my

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my wishes—my despair.—Say, say quickly —what consolation canst *thou* offer in return?"

"I would bid you, Signora, not despair.

"And is this *all* thou canst say, Zofloya?"

"Are you of a firm and persevering spirit, Signora?"

"This heart knows not to shrink," she answered, forcibly striking her bosom, while her eyes flashed fire; "and in its purpose would persevere, even to destruction!"

"Are such the attributes of your character, Signora? Then what earthly wishes are

are not to be atchieved by the united force of firmness and perseverance?"

"I see not how firmness and perseverance can avail me here, however valuable in themselves may be those qualities."

"Not so, beautiful Victoria."

"Your words are ambiguous, Zofloya; deign to be explicit," said Victoria hastily.

"Will you consider me so, when I assert, that if you determine to act up to what you have just said, no accidental combinations can prevent you from obtaining your utmost wishes?"

"Hah! say you so, enchanting Moor?" exclaimed

exclaimed Victoria, half frantic with joy at the meaning contained in his words; and, breathless with contending emotions of hope and doubt, seizing his hand, she pressed it to her bosom.

"Signora! be calm, be composed," cried Zofloya, "and honor not thus, unworthily, the lowest of your slaves."

"Speak on then, Zofloya; your words are magic, they soothe my soul, and I feel *hope!*"

"And if I speak on, you will not bid me cease; you will not shrink, Signora."

Victoria's only answer was an expressive smile and gesture.

Zofloya then resumed——

"Before,

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"Before, Signora, by the unhappy defeat of my countrymen, in Granada, by Ferdinand of Arragon, I became the property of the Spaniard, who dying, recommended me to Signor Henriquez, I had, from early youth, been addicted to the study of arts as well as arms; botany, chemistry, and astrology, were my favorite pursuits; and this turn of mind was further encouraged and improved by an ancient Moor of Granada, who took pleasure in cultivating my taste, and eventually increased considerably my information on various points, and to a surprising extent. While in the kingdom of Arragon, resident with the Spaniard, my late master, I continued to have full leisure for the pursuit of my favorite branches of study, for he treated me as a friend and an equal, rather than as a miserable captive and domestic."

"Oh,

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"Oh, Zofloya! Zofloya!" impatiently cried Victoria, "this is irrelavent."

"Suffer me to proceed, however, Signora," gravely observed the Moor, with an air that repressed the violence, and commanded the attention of his auditor.

"In consequence of the liberty I enjoyed, I devoted myself, as I have said, to my favorite pursuits; I obtained a perfect knowledge of simples and earths, and how drugs are compounded from them. No one could go beyond the infallibility of my calculations, as to their effect. To chemistry, then, I became particularly attached, without, however, resigning my astrological pursuits. Close application, (favored too, as perseverance usually is, by the deductions of accidental observation,) taught me in time, amidst

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amidst a vast variety of chemical science, to compound poisons with such infinite art, that, from the most speedy and subtile, I could vary their degrees to the slowest and most imperceptible. I tried them (experimentally as it were) first upon animals, and then upon those who had offended me!"

"Victoria started; but the Moor, appearing not to notice it, proceeded:

"Upon these I tried, alternately, my speedy and lingering poisons. I have seen the little greyhound, one moment frisking at my feet, and the next, without a struggle, sink, motionless, beside them. I have seen the man I hated, who had forgotten he had ever offended me, smiling in my face, and lingering under the imperceptible but certain influence of the poison that had been administered to him,

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him, and which circulated in his blood, gently leading him to the gates of death! for the female who had dared to prefer *another* to *me*, I have first wreaked my vengeance on her lover, and then on herself. By the power of the drugs I have given them, their love for each other has been alternately changed to hate; and they have only recovered from the delirium, to be separately destroyed by the effect! In no instance have I ever failed in my calculations of the event. That which I willed came to pass, and came to pass in the *manner* that I willed it!—Many other surprising secrets of art and nature became revealed to me; but, to expatiate upon them now would be, as you have said, irrelavent to the subject; therefore to the point.—I now demand of you, Signora, whether *you* would choose the slow poison, or the swift?"

Victoria

Victoria was for a moment staggered at this unexpected question, which again the Moor seeming not to observe, took from his pocket a small gold box, which opening, Victoria perceived to contain several divisions; from one of these he drew a little folded paper, and thus proceeded:

"This paper contains one of the most subtile and delicate poisons that ever, by the hand of art, could be composed. It deals unerring death, but deals it slowly. It may be administered in wine, in food—it may even be completely introduced into the system, by the puncture of the smallest pin! It is this which I should recommend to you, Signora, for a beginning; take it and use it as opportunity shall present: should opportunities but unfrequently occur, you will yourself know how to make them."

Victoria

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Victoria stretched forth her hand, and took the paper—for a moment she was silent, and then said——

"This, then, is for Berenza."

The Moor smiled expressively, and waved his hand, as if to say, "that surely requires no answer;" then, assuming a more serious air, he coolly observed—

"When barriers oppose the attainment of a favorite object, the barriers must either be laid low, or the object remain unattained. To remedy an evil, it is necessary to strike at the root. Nothing is to be gained by lopping the branches which arise therefrom. Thus, should you resolve to overstep common boundaries, and that which is termed female delicacy, by openly declaring your passion

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to Henriquez, and he (even setting defiance to consequence) should return it; how do you imagine, that while the wife of another, you could enjoy unrestrained delight with the choice of your soul? Do you want resolution then, fair Signora, to effect, by means so trifling, your highest wishes?—and did I err," he added ironically, "in the different estimate I had formed of your character?"

"It is not that I want resolution," returned Victoria, somewhat piqued. "I desire, oh, how ardently desire, the death —the annihilation of Berenza; but, by these means, to take his life!—it is not that I hesitate, however!" and ashamed, confused at what she deemed her cowardice, she stopped——

"It is not that you hesitate," in an accent half serious, half disdainful, returned

turned the Moor; "and why *should* you hesitate? *he* had no hesitation in sacrificing to himself your young and beautiful person, for his gratification; and why should you hesitate, now, at sacrificing him for yours? You hate him; yet you receive with dissembled pleasure those endearments which he lavishes upon you. In depriving him of life, you would do him far less wrong. Surely the conscience of Victoria is not subjugated to a confessor? From whence then arises this unexpected demur? Is not self predominant throughout animal nature? and what is the boasted supremacy of man, if, eternally, he must yield his happiness to the paltry suggestions of scholastic terms, or the pompous definitions of right and wrong? His reasoning mind, then, is given him only for his torment, and to wage war against his happiness; yet what cause can be adduced, why *another*

must be permitted to stand between him, and his fair prospects, overshadowing them with hopeless gloom? What argument can be adduced against his removal?——For him, of whom we are speaking, he has enjoyed, already, many years of existent pleasure; he must now yield his place to another; for he has not a right to monopolize to his share the pleasures of others. Besides, were he to live a thousand years longer, each day must be but a tasteless repetition of the past; for, in length of time, even the zest of pleasure wears off; and when we come to reflect, after this long disquisition into which we have been drawn, what is the momentous consideration, whether the breath of a man be hastened a few moments sooner from his body, than sickness, accident, or a thousand chances might have propelled it, and in the common course of things have befriended you;

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you;—yet, if none of these happen to arise, a mind of enterprise, endowed with the strength and power of right reason, steps with unshrinking foot a little from the beaten track."

Zofloya paused—the cool deliberateness of his manner, in expressing his sentiments, induced Victoria to believe that they were the result of conviction, deduced from accurate reflection, and the having given to the subject the rational consideration of a towering and superior mind, rather than the cruel or forced constructions of the moment. Under this impression, she could not avoid saying——

"Zofloya, you possess strong powers of reflection, and you are eloquent."

"Charming Signora," in a softened

 voice,

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voice, answered the Moor, "I am not naturally eloquent, but the wish of promoting your happiness renders me so."

Pride filled the heart of Victoria, and she smiled.

"Ah!" pursued the Moor, "that beauteous form was never made to pine by hopeless love!—no, it was not made to sink to the earth a victim to ungratified sensations, to yield, to fall a sacrifice to imperious circumstances. Ah! Victoria, beautiful Victoria! *Zofloya must fly you in despair, should you disdain his proffered services.*"

Oh, Flattery, like heavenly dew upon the earth, gratefully dost thou descend upon the ear of woman! Indescribable leasure dilated the bosom of Victoria, as

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as she listened to the honied accents of the delicate Moor. She put forth her hand towards him, and, when he softly seized and pressed it to his lips, the haughty Venetian was not offended.

"Tell me then, Zofloya," she said, with slight hesitation, "how must I use this bland and dangerous enemy?"

At night, in wine, Signora; in morning beverage; when, and how you can: ere long its effects will become discernible."

"The Conte, at a certain hour of the day, drinks lemonade," observed Victoria, which I was once in the habit of administering to him; he used to say it tasted sweeter from my hand."

"Renew your tender offices," said

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Zofloya, with a meaning smile, "and increase your opportunities: the powder I have given you is of the minutest particles; the smallest atom is sufficient at a time. Using it at the rate of twice a day, it will not be exhausted for ten days; at the end of that period, the perceptible effect that shall have been produced upon Berenza will direct us to proceed. Now, Signora, allow me to conduct you hence." So saying, Zofloya gently taking Victoria by the arm, led her, with a kind of respectful freedom, from the spot.

CHAP.

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CHAP. XXI.

WITH unshrinking soul, and eye unabashed by the consciousness of guilt, Victoria joined at supper the innocent family circle. The high blush of animation flushed her dark cheek with more than usual fire; her eyes sparkled, but it was with a fiend-like exultation, and her nerves seemed new strung for the execution of her dreadful purpose.

Berenza rejoiced at her appearance, and little surmising the cause, approached, in the fulness of his heart, to embrace her; she returned it impatiently, and pushing him from her, surveyed him, with a kind of half smile, from head to foot.

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The unconscious Berenza mistook this for the embrace of eager love, repentant at past coldness, and the accompanying action for sportive gaiety only. But it was not so; Victoria hastily embraced him, from the cruel reflection that he would not long have the power of soliciting these marks of an affection that she felt not, nor she the hated task of granting them:—in pushing him from her, she but yielded to an overpowering impulse of the hatred which possessed her bosom; while gazing on him with a smile, she consoled herself with the thought—how soon he would cease to be!

At supper she could not forbear sometimes casting her ardent eyes upon Henriquez, anticipating future delight; while his were fixed as usual upon the blooming fairy, Lilla. But her Victoria now regarded only with contempt, from the suggestion

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suggestion that she was an atom too easily crushed to cause a moment's painful thought. Yet she failed not to pay attention to all; and the vivacity of her manner, the brilliancy of her wit, attracted, as it was wont to do, the pleased admiration of all towards her.

"Come, my life," cried the enraptured Berenza, raising the glass to his lips, "Here's to thy happiness, and the success of *thy every wish:* drink all of you the same," he added, looking round the table.

Every one obeyed, and drank to the happiness of her, who, in that moment, meditated their destruction.

"And now," she cried, playfully, "it is my turn; and taking two goblets off the table, she flew to a recess at the end

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of the saloon, where wines and ices were set out upon a small marble table; filling them to the brim with Vino Greco, and infusing into the glass that had been hers a small quantity of the poison, (which instantly incorporated itself with the wine, and disappeared,) she returned to the supper table with well-dissembled innocent sportiveness, and exclaimed—

"Fill your glasses all round."

All obeyed again, and held their glasses in their hands.

"Here, Berenza, is *my* glass," she cried; "drink from it as I will drink from yours—To the *speedy fulfilment of our wishes!*"

The fatal toast was drunk, and "To the speedy fulfilment of our wishes," echoed

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ed round the table, while the devoted Berenza, whose only wish was the gratification of Victoria, drank eagerly to promote it the first draught of death! and looking tenderly upon her, exclaimed, "To the speedy fulfilment of *thy* wishes," thus emphatically calling on his own destruction.

Victoria smiling, fixed her eyes upon him —in a few moments she imagined he turned pale: he passed his hand hastily across his eyes, as if sensible of a slight sudden pain in his head; she became apprehensive she had given him more than was prudent for a first dose, and that she would be betrayed: presently, however, her fears subsided, the colour returned to the cheeks of Berenza, and the pain passed away. Uninterrupted gaiety then reigned to the end of supper, and till the

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the lateness of the hour warned them to separate.

From this eventful period, Victoria omitted no opportunity of administering insidious death to the unsuspicious Berenza. Sometimes, with the point of a small fruit knife, which she retained about her for the purpose, she introduced the baleful poison within the fruit, while offering it to him on the point of her knife; thus remorselessly rendering him to himself the dealer of his own death.

After once or twice, the poison no longer took an immediately perceptible effect upon him; the stomach becoming habituated, no longer evinced resistless loathing as it received the gradual destruction, which, blending its baleful influence with its other juices, was conveyed

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ed into the system. At the expiration of eight or ten days, a change, scarcely marked by others, but fully perceived by Victoria, became apparent in the hapless Berenza; the blood of his cheeks, which, on first taking the poison, vanished back for a few moments, seemed, as by repeated checks, to have become more languid in its circulation, and tinged them no longer, as formerly, with the vermilion hue of health. A kind of tremulousness began to possess his nerves, and a dry but faint cough gave frequent symptoms that the mischief had begun to work.

Satisfied with these appearances, on the evening of the tenth day, for the eagerness of Victoria (now that she had commenced her dreadful plan) had not suffered an atom of the poison to remain beyond, she sought, as previously agreed,

Zofloya,

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Zofloya, in the appointed spot: when she arrived, she perceived him not; already her dark mind became suspicious of the delay;—"Zofloya! Zofloya!" she cried, in an under voice, "where art thou?"

"Here," replied a voice, like the sweet murmuring sound of an Æolian harp, swept by the breath of the zephyr; and, turning, she beheld at her side the towering figure of the Moor.

She had not seen, neither had she heard his approach; and, ashamed of the doubts she had felt, and the impatience she had evinced, she could not, as his commanding eyes looked down upon her, for the moment speak.

"Well, beautiful Victoria," he said, "behold me here; and suffer me now to ask,

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ask, does hope begin to cheer your long-benighted bosom?"

"Yes," answered Victoria, "I entertain hope, the fond hope, Zofloya, that I shall have good cause to mark the day, when, irresistibly impelled by the kind sympathy of thy manner, I confided to thee the cause of my sorrows."

And I too, Signora, shall have proud cause to *mark* that day; for it gave to the unworthy slave, Zofloya, the most beautiful and enterprising of her sex."

"It gave thee my friendship, indeed, Zofloya," said Victoria, slightly surprised; "it gave thee my gratitude, not myself; for I am irrevocably, as thou knowest, devoted to another."

"Be not offended, beautiful Victoria, nor

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nor let us waste the precious moments in defining terms; for the Signor Henriquez, to whom I am obedient for your sweet sake alone, requires my presence: were it not for you, Zofloya would no longer appear in a character unfitting his state, the character of a menial."

"And what would you then, generous Zofloya? for sure you were the attendant of Henriquez, ere I became known to you."

"Were *you* otherwise than *you are*, fair Victoria, I should not now be here."

"Is it even so?—then am I indeed indebted to you, most excellent Moor, for the sacrifices which you make to my service, and never, never can I sufficiently repay you."

"You

"You will, you do repay me, kind Signora; but time wastes: let me now give what you require, the second powder, for——" He concluded his meaning with a smile; then taking the box from his pocket, he drew forth a second powder, but from a different division, and presenting it to Victoria, he said—

"This powder is a degree more powerful than the last; you will administer it the same, and the effects will be proportionably increased. This, likewise, will last you ten days, and in that time you will observe in Berenza the flame of life become fainter and fainter. To all around his illness will wear the appearance of languor and gentle decay, no one will suspect death to be at hand; by you, some cold caught, and unnoticed at the time, must be fondly alluded to, and suggested as the cause; by tenderness

and

and unlimited attention, by soothing and consolation, you must shut his eyes on the danger of his situation, and administer with your poison the fallacious hope, that his constitution will triumph over the cureless malady; so that no advice, and, if possible, not any medicines, may be resorted to, lest they should counteract or retard the workings of his delicate enemy. You will thus behold him perishing away, like the rose, which carries the canker-worm hidden in its heart, or the tree, that, blasted by the lightning, can never more recover its verdure."

The Moor paused; but Victoria appearing violently agitated, as if overcome by some sudden thought or recollection, remained silent.

Her uneasiness was not unobserved by Zofloya;

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Zofloya; but he only gazed upon her, without inquiring the cause, leaving it to herself to reveal the workings of her mind.

At length, fixing her eyes upon his countenance, she said in a hurried voice—

"Zofloya, Venice will never do for the seat of action; it would be folly, it would be madness to make the attempt. Such an undertaking as ours, if crowned by success, would prove ultimate destruction; know you not, know you not, Zofloya, that nothing can remain concealed from Il Consiglio di Dieci?"

"But you commit no crime against the state, Signora; you are no heretic."

"True, but the pretended accusation for these crimes are frequently the vehicles

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cles of punishment for other offences; hatred, suspicion, or malice, conveys an anonymous line into the lion's mouth; the familiars of the holy inquisition are every where, and, though summoned before its awful tribunal upon false grounds, the torture soon wrests from you a confession of those offences of which you have been really guilty. No, Zofloya, the attainment of my object avails me nothing, if destruction follows the momentary triumph."

"Well, Signora, though I think that your fears magnify the danger, yet the alternative which occurs is easy; persuade the Conte to quit Venice."

But whither to go?" she said, with an embarrassed air; "all Italy is equally dangerous."

Zofloya

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Zofloya made an impatient gesture, as if to reprove the hesitation of Victoria; after a moment, she resumed—

"I have heard Berenza speak of Torre Alto; it is the name of a castle appertaining to him, which is situated among the Appennines."

"A retirement there would at least suit your purpose; the prying steps of curiosity will not follow you, and discovery cannot reach you."

"But should Berenza object, as *I* have hitherto done, to a temporary removal thither?"

"Then can you adduce a thousand reasons; a desire for solitude, a wish to visit a spot you have never yet seen, or lastly, a suggestion that change of air and

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and situation might speedily restore his health."

"It shall be so, Zofloya; pity the distraction of a wretch, whose mind is rendered imbecile by misery, and who of herself is incapable of an effort towards her own happiness; aided and advised by thee, I may command success."

The Moor smiled—"Your fate, your fortune, fair Signora, will be of your own making: I am but the humble tool, the slave of your wishes; your co-operation with me can alone render me powerful; but fly me, disdain my assistance, and despise my friendship I *sink abashed into myself, and am powerless!* Farewel, Signora; I have already staid too long; for the present you need me no more." Abruptly then Zofloya turned away, and quitted the presence of Victoria, who took

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took her steps, musingly, towards the house.

At supper, soon as with wine and conversation the spirits of Berenza became joyous and elevated, she artfully seized an opportunity of introducing the subject nearest her heart; she spoke of Torre Alto, and expressed a desire to visit its sublime solitudes, professing herself to be still further influenced from the flattering presumption, (looking tenderly at Berenza, as she made the assertion), that change of atmosphere and a more elevated situation might be a means of bracing his nerves, and restoring him to his pristine health.

Whatever the tender and unsuspicious Berenza believed, it was enough for him that Victoria expressed the wish, for him unhesitatingly to comply with it; while the welcome, but fallacious hope pressed

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upon his heart, that devoted to love and him, and desirous to prove to him that she was so, she abandoned, without regret, the vain pleasures and amusements of the voluptuous city, for a solitude no longer unpleasing to her. Charmed at this return to reason and rationality, he fondly persuaded himself that the evening of his days would close like the brilliant beauty of a western sky declining into the shadows of night. Fearful even that her purpose might change, he expatiated on the beauty, the situation of his castella; and, desirous to offer every possible allurement to her perseverance, he entreated that Henriquez, his fair mistress, and her ancient protectress, would be of the intended party.

To this, Henriquez, who fondly loved his brother, readily acquiesced, and ventured to promise for Lilla and the Signora,

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nora, as with a smile he looked towards them, to deprecate the possibility of a refusal.

Victoria, perceiving in the hapless Berenza such unhoped-for eagerness in coincidence with her plan, artfully forbore to press the subject further; but her alarm being awakened, lest the relation of Lilla should object to the journey, and thereby (an idea that was not endurable) detain Henriquez in Venice, she exerted the fascinations of her kindness towards her, and observed with seeming pleasure, as if the point of her acquiescence had been settled, what infinite benefit would, in all probability, result to her own health, in consequence of the salubrious change.

The poor old Signora did not exactly think so, but it was enough that Victoria condescended to say it, and to direct to-

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wards her unusual attention, for her not to hesitate. Besides, as self-love is no less inherent in age than youth, she felt no little gratification in being deemed of sufficient consequence for solicitation.

All preliminaries being speedily arranged, it was agreed, ere they rose from table, that the following day should only intervene for the conclusion of some necessary preparations, and that on the subsequent morning they would take their departure from the gay city of Venice, for the Castella di Torre Alto, among the Appennines.

CHAP.

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CHAP. XXII.

On a lovely morning, early in spring, the party, descending the steps of St. Mark's, embarked on the Brenta for the Appennines. Victoria, seated by the side of Berenza, administered to him the tenderest, the most deceitful attentions; the fair and beautiful Lilla, with her long flaxen tresses almost veiling her fairy form, seated by the side of Henriquez, caught the soft breathings of his love, and, without looking upon him, *felt* the warm glances of his eyes, which thrilled with voluptuous tenderness her innocent soul. The aged Signora, proud to be among the youthful party, though of little interest to any, save her orphan charge, sat contented in the enjoyment of others; for

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venerable age but rarely attracts the portion of consideration which is due to it. Zofloya, towering as a demi-god, with his plumed and turbaned head, his dark form contrasted, and embellished by his bracelets of pearl, and by the snowy hue of his garments, was stationed near the stern of the vessel, and ravished the surrounding party with his exquisite harmony, to which even the undulating waves, in the rapt ear of enthuastic fancy, appeared to keep respectful music.

Never was fatal journey performed under fairer auspices, never with fonder triumph did the bridegroom conduct his long loved mistress to the altar, than the poor Berenza conducted to his solitude, among mountains, the faithless Victoria. He saw no solitude when she was by; to him she was the peopled world of pleasure, and in the fulness of his exhilarated

exhilarated heart, he blest the moment which, by visiting him with sickness, restored him, as he thought, the affections of a wife he had feared was lost to him.

To be brief—their journey concluded, and arrived at Torre Alto, Victoria observed herself, with a gloomy and secret delight, enclosed within the profoundest solitudes, for no town, no hamlet was even near the Castella of Berenza, which was situated in a deep valley, on the borders of a forest. On either side huge rocks towered above its loftiest spires, and half embosomed it in terrible but majestic sublimity, while no sound disturbed the solemn silence of the scene but the fall of the impetuous cataract, as it tumbled from the stupendous acclivity into the depths below, or the distant sound of the vesper-bell tolling solemn from the nearest convent, with, at times, when the wind

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blew towards the castle, the murmuring peal of the lofty-sounding organ, caught at intervals in the breeze, seeming more like the mysterious music of the spirits of the air, than sounds from mortal haunts.

"Here, then," said Victoria, as on the morning after her arrival she gazed from her chamber window upon the beautifully terrific scenery, and the immeasurable waste of endless solitude which composed it—"Here, then, without danger, may I pursue the path leading to the summit of my wishes; no prying eye can pierce through, here, the secret movements which, to compass my soul's desire, may be requisite. Hail then to these blissful solitudes, hail to them, since they perhaps may first witness the rich harvest of my persevering love; and for such a love, perish—perish, all that may oppose it!"

While

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While thus she continued, her eyes indeed wandering wildly over the world of mountains, but her thoughts far, far beyond them, she was roused by the mild voice of Berenza, who gently seizing her arm, smilingly inquired the subject of her reverie.

A faint blush suffused the guilt-bronzed cheek of Victoria, as in a low voice she merely replied, "I was contemplating the grandeur of the surrounding scenery, my Lord."

"And do you know, beloved Victoria," replied Berenza, "that I fancy my health already improved from the effects of our journey, this beautiful seclusion, and these pure airs."

Victoria felt that this idea of Berenza's was

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indeed mere fancy, for well she knew that, on the preceding evening, unrestrained by his fatigue, the circumstances of the moment, or the pallid cheek of Berenza, she had administered to him his death-dealing draught. The bare assertion, however, that he did not feel ill, disturbed her for the moment, and she secretly resolved, that in the next draught she would mingle more of the poison. For the present, however, she accompanied him from the window, and joined the party already assembled at breakfast.

Persevering with relentless barbarity, ere the ten days were concluded, Victoria had administered to the Conte the last atom of the poison; she therefore, as evening came on, wandered forth, in hopes of encountering the Moor, with whom, since

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since her arrival at Torre Alto, she had scarcely found an opportunity of conversing.

She took her way across the almost pathless forest; for the deeper and more gloomy the solitude, the more probable she thought it, that Zoffoya would choose it for his haunt.

Accordingly, she had not proceeded far, ere, as if informed by sympathetic influence of her wishes, she beheld the stately Moor issuing from a break among the trees, directly across her path. She called to him aloud; when, slightly bowing, he arrested his steps till she came up with him.

Impatience to begin on subjects more important, prevented her from remarking the cool and haughty conduct of Zofloya,

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who, instead of proceeding rapidly to meet her, had contented himself with awaiting her arrival at the spot where he stood.

"Zofloya," she said, as she took his arm, and walked rapidly onwards, "can you not at once deliver me from the tortures I endure? Having embarked thus far, my soul is sick of the delay; I therefore implore, if you desire to serve me, that you will do it speedily and effectually."

"Signora," answered the Moor gravely, "your movements have already outstepped my directions, and your precipitancy has gone near to defeat your views: the present illness of the Conte is of a nature to induce gradual and ultimate dissolution; there is nothing in its *appearance*, which in the common course of

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of things, could warrant the event of sudden death; such an occurrence, therefore, would give immediate rise to suspicion, with every colour of justice on its side: behold, therefore, and pardon my abruptness," he added, "here is that which will cause considerable change in the Conte. Seven days will exhaust it: but it must not be exhausted in a shorter period. Moreover, Signora, I warn you, that if my directions are in the smallest tittle infringed, you weaken the power by which I act, and destroy the effect which strict adherence to the rules laid down can alone produce." Then giving a small paper into the hands of Victoria, with distant air he bowed his head, and, striking immediately into the deep recesses of the wood, became lost to her view.

"Singular being," thought Victoria, as with slow and meditating steps she retook

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took her path towards the castella, "how happens it, that with a thousand questions to ask him, I find time to ask him nothing? and, with a thousand inquiries to make respecting himself, my tongue refuses in his presence to perform its office, and I remain unsatisfied?' Thus reflecting, she increased her pace, for the darkest shadows of evening were beginning to fall. As she approached the castle, she beheld coming, as if to seek her, the youthful Henriquez, unconscious object of the devouring flame that consumed her. At sight of him, her heart throbbed, and various emotions filled her breast.

"I come, Signora," he cried, as he drew near, "at the desire of my brother; he became impatient at your absence, perhaps apprehensive at this late hour, and

and entreated that I would seek and accompany you home."

"A task," said Victoria, in a reproachful accent, "which you would rather have been spared."

"No, indeed, Signora," coolly, though politely, answered Henriquez, "to give a moment's ease to the bosom of a beloved brother, to attend to his last request, and gratify even his most insignificant wishes, I could never deem a task."

"To wish for me, was indeed an insignificant wish," gloomily observed Victoria.

"I said not so, Signora."

As he spoke, the foot of Victoria striking

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striking against a point of projecting stone, she stumbled; Henriquez instinctively caught her arm. Victoria snatched it away resentfully, and, while tears almost started to her eyes, she said—

"No matter, Signor Henriquez, no matter to you if I fall."

"Good Heaven! Signora, why should you think thus? How have I given rise to so unjust a surmise?"

"You know, you know you hate," in an agitated voice, cried Victoria, thrown entirely off her guard.

Henriquez looked towards her with surprise, and, at a loss what to reply, bowed with an embarrassed air.

Victoria

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Victoria remained silent for a few moments, and then in a calmer voice resumed—

"Had the Conte desired you to seek Lilla, with what alacrity would you have obeyed."

"Ah!" returned Henriquez, with animation, "who could have reminded me to seek Lilla? since my eyes, accustomed to dwell upon her, would so soon have missed their wonted delight."

Victoria scowled, with mingled rage and jealousy, upon Henriquez; but he looked not towards her, and if he had, the hour had been almost too dark for him to distinguish the expression of her countenance, which was so terrible, it might almost have been felt by inspiration. By degrees, however, she quelled

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the violence of her sensations, and, in a smothered voice, observed—

"Henriquez, you love Lilla."

"Love!" he emphatically replied, "I adore her! I idolize her! She is the light of my eyes, the sunshine of my soul, the spring which actuates my existence! Without her, life to me would be a dreary blank; and, if fate snatched her from me in *this* world, I would die, yes, hasten to die, that my soul might rejoin her in the next, and my body repose by her pure form in the grave."

"Oh! madness, madness!" muttered Victoria, and involuntarily grasped Henriquez by the arm.

"Signora, are you ill?" he cried, instantly stopping.

"No,

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"No, no, no; but I——I was almost on the point of falling again," she answered, gasping for breath; and in that instant she wavered, whether the powder she retained in her bosom should not be destined to Lilla rather then Berenza.

While this idea crossed her mind, she beheld the innocent girl bounding towards them through the gloom, seeming like an aërial spirit, seen by the dubious light, scarcely appearing in its delicate movements to touch the ground. Instantly the rage of her bosom changed into laughing contempt: she felt her least power could at any time annihilate this, the most fragile of nature's productions, and disdained herself, that she had even cast a thought upon an atom so insignificant.

Henriquez flew instantly to meet her,

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her, Victoria slowly followed, and altogether entered the castle, the tender Lilla with her right hand holding one of Victoria's, and passing the left round her waist. Proceeding to the room where Berenza awaited them, they found him stretched at length upon a sopha, which being of crimson colour, added a more deadly tinge to the paleness of his complexion; as soon as he beheld Victoria, he stretched forth his hand to her, and exclaimed—

"Oh, my love, whither have you been? I have been wishing for my tender nurse to make me a glass of lemonade."

"I have been walking in the forest, my love," replied Victoria, and I went further then I intended; but let me hasten to prepare your drink."

So

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So saying, she quitted the room, and in a few moments returned, with a glass of lemonade, into which she had already infused a sufficient quantity of poison. Its additional force discomfited, as at first, the debilitated stomach of the unfortunate Berenza, for he had drunk it all with avidity. Complaining of faintish sickness, he motioned for Victoria to sit beside him; and, leaning his head upon her faithless bosom, seemed presently overcome by a profound sleep. Soon, however, it became disturbed and interrupted by convulsive catchings; that innocent breath, which issued from his lips, and passed over the face of Victoria, spoke no reproach to her remorseless bosom. A feverish glow passed over his cheek, and now was succeeded by a deadly paleness; now his hand involuntarily shook, and now different parts of his body yielded to a tremulous convulsion; his lips quivered,

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quivered, his eye-lids became agitated by a nervous motion, and he half-opened his eyes, over which there appeared a dimness like a thin film. Again the heart of Victoria yielded to selfish terror, lest she had administered too powerful a dose of the poison. Berenza, however, was not awake, though his eyes remained half open; she took his burning hand, and, actuated by her fears, strongly pressed it; the action recalled in a moment the fleeting senses of Berenza; he started and opened his eyes, from which the film vanished; then perceiving the false Victoria bending over him, the complaint he was about to utter died upon his lips, and fearful of giving uneasiness to her, who was deliberately consuming his life, he even repressed the look of anguish, straining it into a tender smile, and smothered the sigh of agony which was bursting from his bosom.

"Dear

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"Dear Berenza, you are ill," cried Victoria, gazing with dissembled fondness in his face.

"Only a little languid, my beloved," answered he, "a few glasses of wine will reanimate me." So saying, he rose, endeavouring to conceal the access of weakness, of which he became sensible, from the eyes of every one, but more particularly from those of Victoria; and requesting they might repair to the supper room, he was that night permitted, not from her compassion, but her base policy, to drink his wine unmingled with the baleful poison. Yet bitterly she regretted what she felt to be so necessary an intermission.

CHAP.

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CHAP. XXIII.

THE allotted week had not expired, ere change sufficient was visible in the unfortunate Berenza, to satisfy even the soul of Victoria, thirsting as it was for his innocent blood. It was in vain that he gazed on her with eyes of dying fondness; it was in vain that, when oppressed by raging thirst, he called on her for drink, and would receive it from no hand but hers: even this disarmed not her heart of its fell purpose, even this touched it not with an emotion of pity or remorse. Still she infused, with hand restricted only by fear of danger to herself, the consuming poison into the coveted draught, which, so far from allaying the fever of his blood, was as oil to the devouring flame.

Still

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Still Berenza dreamed not that his death was nigh; true, he felt within him, an inanity as it were, a languor of the heart, with sometimes a kind of distaste and weariness of former objects; he knew not precisely the nature of his own sensations, for they varied occasionally; often his spirits were animated, but then it was an animation which diffused not its vivifying current through the pulses of his heart: it sprang not thence, neither did it leave cheerfulness behind; it seemed independent of himself, as the artificial vivacity which is raised by the power of wine. Always, after the animal spirits had been thus pressed into action, as it were, he became feebler, and more dejected from the strained exertion. This Victoria observing, and instantly concluding that wine, while it exhilarated him for the moment, must still tend to parch up the vital heat, she induced him to drink

 plentifully

plentifully of it, thereby causing it to answer the double purpose, of blinding him to his actual danger, and hastening his death.

His cough had now become more serious, exercise was fatiguing to him, and all society but that of Victoria irksome; thus was he completely in her power, but nevertheless she durst not go beyond the directions of Zofloya. The person of the Conte, however, underwent no considerable alteration; his complexion only had become somewhat pallid, though occasionally it glowed with a transparent red; but though feeble, and slightly emaciated, his appetite was increased even to ravenousness.

From this circumstance he could not believe himself in actual danger, but rather coincided with the pretended hope of

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of Victoria, that time, and a naturally robust constitution, would triumph over a disorder that he firmly attributed (as Victoria had suggested) to some neglected and unnoticed cold. The wilds of the Appennines seldom tempted him to roam: with the inhabitants of a few gloomy castellas, scattered here and there, at immense distances from his own, he never associated; and Victoria affirmed, in order to keep him more secure, and avoid the remotest risk of drawing attention towards them, that quiet and rest were absolutely indispensable to his recovery.

Whatever she willed, right or otherwise, was law to the fond, the dying Berenza, who forgot in her present apparent tenderness towards him, and seeming devotement, all former coolness and discontent; at the very moment in which,

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with treacherous hand but looks of love, she held towards him the life destroying draught, in that moment was she dearer to his soul than ever, and often, ere he put it to his parched lips, did he stay his eagerness, to kiss the false hand that presented it.

In vain did Henriquez entreat of his infatuated brother to receive advice, to explain his sensations, only to hear the opinion of a physician: no, he steadily refused; Victoria was all-sufficient, and on her tender care would he alone depend.

The poison, however, being now exhausted, and the week elapsed, Victoria finding that the miserable Berenza was not only yet in existence, but that for the two last days he had not appeared more evidently reduced than he had for some time past, became absolutely impatient to

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to a degree of savageness, and cursed the feeble life that still struggled to retain possession of its worn-out tenement; deeming it therefore requisite to seek Zofloya, she again repaired to that part of the forest where she had last encountered him. This time the Moor seemed awaiting her, and hastening towards her, as she approached, he said——

"You are impatient, Signora, at the strength of the Conte's constitution; is it not so?—But rest satisfied, your end is answered; he cannot long survive."

"Yet does he not appear worse this evening than he did eight days ago," murmuringly observed Victoria.

"Probably not, Signora; yet are the principles of life irreparably sapped, and though you should now resign all further

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attempts to utterly destroy them, though every aid of medicine might be essayed, yet never now could nature recover herself, for he must eventually and speedily perish."

"But how soon? or he may linger for years, even till old age shall have chilled the ardent fires which now burn in my bosom, till my passions shall have withered away, and my energies become damped! Oh, Zofloya! if you desire to serve me, let it be at once; hitherto you have but trifled."

The Moor started back, and looked scowlingly upon Victoria; never before had she beheld him look so terrible: in an instant her proud rage subsided, her eyes were cast on the earth, and she trembled at what she had suffered to escape her lips. Yes, Victoria, who never before trembled

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trembled in the presence of mortal being, who did not tremble to agonise and insult a father, to revile a mother, and consign a husband to the grave, trembled now, in the presence of Zofloya. To herself even, the sensation she experienced was inexplicable; and involuntarily approaching the Moor, who was still distant from her, she took his hand, and said—"Forgive me, Zofloya; pardon my abruptness, and attribute it to the irksome delay I suffer in my hopes, which confuses and distracts my brain."

"'Tis well, Signora," answered the Moor, gracefully, yet haughtily bending and waving his hand.

"You forgive me, Zofloya; deign then to advise me."

"I direct, Siguora, not advise, and at

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the same time must observe, that the fullest confidence is to be placed in me; you have not yet found that I have deceived you; it will be early enough for reproaches, when you discover that I have. Spare them, I beseech you then, till the arrival of that period; your doubts must vanish meantime, and, if you wish my assistance, I must be suffered, without comment, to pursue that line best calculated to render it effectual. I told you, that the drug I gave you would work the destruction of the Conte; did I not add, that it would work it slowly? Would you have desired it should be immediate, to frustrate for ever your own hopes, and end at once my business here?"

"Well, Zofloya, I will in all respects follow your directions; relax then the sternness of your brow, and smile upon me as usual."

"Beautiful

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"Beautiful Victoria! you are resistless," cried Zofloya, dropping on one knee—"'tis I now who sue for pardon, and promise to devote myself to your service."

"Rise, gentle Moor, and accept my hand," cried the vain and flattered Victoria; "never shall I have power to recompense you."

"*You recompense me, Signora, in accepting my services;* deign now to listen to me: you desire that Berenza should be cut at once from the face of the earth. I deem it more advisable that he should be left to the concluding effects of the poison he has already imbibed; but that I may gratify your wishes, and, above all, guard against the possibility of disappointment, I have here a drug which I have known to be immediate in its operations:

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lest, however, it should accidentally fail in the present instance, requiring perhaps a small addition of some corroborative quality, or an increase of the dose, I would recommend a previous trial upon some indifferent subject——" He paused.

"I know of no subject," said Victoria, musingly.

"Has not the orphan Lilla an old female relative with her?" observed Zofloya; "she is, as far as I can see, a most useless appendage, and hereafter might even prove troublesome."

"True," replied Victoria; "she would answer excellently for an experiment."

The Moor smiled with malice. "I would have you then, Signora, lead the officious dame into the forest; I will shortly

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shortly appear, as if by your previous desire, with two glasses of wine or lemonade; you will take the one which I shall put next to you, and present the other to the old Signora. She is feeble, and tottering on the verge of the grave; should not an immediate effect be perceptible on *her* swallowing it, we must add a grain for the benefit of the Conte."

"But should it not take instant effect, we shall be betrayed, Zofloya."

"Leave that to me, Signora, and suffer me to proceed: on my having retired, you shall run hastily towards the castle for assistance, pretending, which will be easily believed, that the Signora hath fallen down in a fit."

"But should any marks of the poison

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become perceptible after her death," interupted the selfish Victoria.

"They will be naturally attributed to the *mode* of her death; no suspicion, rest assured, shall be excited—trust to me, beautiful Victoria. I have an interest, a deep interest, in preserving you from exposure."

"Well, give me the powder then; I rely implicitly upon you." The Moor gave into her hand a small paper containing the poison, and the following morning was agreed on for the trial of its efficacy. Separating then, each reached the castle by different ways.

On the following morning Victoria, having watched her opportunity, entered a little apartment where the aged and inoffensive Signora

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Signora was tranquilly sitting by a window, inhaling, through the bars of a blind, the fresh breeze from the mountains. Solitary, and forsaken by the younger branches of the family, even by the gentle Lilla, who had been drawn away by Henriquez, she smiled with pleasure at the sight of Victoria, who, more rarely than any one, deigned to notice her.

"What, entirely alone, Signora," she exclaimed as she entered; "come then," in a gay and conciliating tone, "come, let me lead you out; you will find the open air do you more service than inhaling it through this confined medium."

The poor Signora, surprised and flattered at such wonderful condescension, rose with trembling limbs, yet with all the alacrity she could assume.

"Lean

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"Lean upon me, good Signora," said Victoria, "and let me assist you."

The gratified and feeble Signora respectfully accepted the offer. Panting with weakness, she gained at length, however, the precincts of the forest. Here Victoria, though she cursed and dreaded the delay, was under the necessity of permitting her for a few moments to rest upon her arm. But her evil genius assisted her evil intent; no one appeared in view, and the fresh air having a little restored the imbecile powers of her unsuspecting companion, she prevailed upon her to proceed, and succeeded at length in luring her, by the unusual honor of her attention, to a more gloomy part of the forest, where a rocky acclivity on one side, offered at its base a rugged and projecting seat. Here Victoria, affecting to have selected this spot for its con-

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convenient attributes in shading them at once from the sun and the wind, and likewise affording them a seat, entreated the Signora to rest, while, with treacherous kindness, she assisted her to sit.

Appearing then infinitely grieved at her evident weariness, though the poor Signora, from complaisance and gratitude, forbore complaint, she observed to her, "You are indeed fatigued, Signora; I apprehend the exertion has been too much for you; allow me to return to the castle and procure you some refreshment—though, generally, the Moor Zofloya brings me about this hour sherbet or lemonade."

"The Santa Maria forbid!" replied the Signora, "that you should give yourself any trouble; a little rest will quite restore

restore me—but I am no longer young, Signora."

At that moment Victoria beheld among the trees the emerald-covered turban of Zofloya, glittering to the sun-beam; her heart leaped, and she rose to receive from him the glasses of lemonade, which he carried in a silver salver. Punctual in taking for herself that which the Moor held towards her, she presented the other to the unconscious Signora, who received it with palsied hand, but with a thankful smile and a dim eye that looked on her with gratitude.

Scarcely, however, had she taken off the fatal draught, ere, overcome by dreadful sickness, she fell headlong from her seat: she essayed to speak, her sunken eyes rolled dreadfully, and, with violent con-

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convulsions, she uttered, "I am—I am poisoned!"

"She will not die," muttered Victoria, in a low voice, to the Moor.

Zofloya replied not, but, stooping over the struggling unfortunate, he compressed her withered throat with his dark hand, and the sounds, half-formed, rattled within it. Then rising, with unruffled visage, he laid his finger on his lip, and pointing towards the castle, precipitately disappeared.

Victoria understood the movement; neither shocked nor alarmed at the frightful outrage committed, she ran from the recess, and, as she gained the castle, called loudly for help. Servants immediately came running different ways, and, when informed that a terrible catastrophe had befallen

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befallen the old Signora, they hastened to the spot. Even Berenza conquered his pain and lassitude, to gaze with awe upon the melancholy fate, a forerunner only of his own. The innocent Lilla, almost frantic, exclaimed in agony, as she leaned over the lifeless body of her only relative, that she had now, indeed, no friend, but was a deserted orphan left destitute in the world.

"Unkind Lilla," cried Henriquez, endeavouring to draw her from the painful scene, "have you not a lover, and can you want a friend?"

Lilla replied not, while tears of anguish coursed down her fair cheeks, and melancholy forebodings filled her breast.

Henriquez passed his arm round her waist, and forced her from the spot, while

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while Victoria gazed upon them as they passed with eyes of malignant rage.

Every one believed that the old Signora had expired suddenly in a fit; some said the air had taken too powerful an effect on her debilitated frame; some, that she had been seized with sudden convulsion; while even the wisest attributed the event to the visitation of Providence, and the infirmity of age, that could no longer support the burden of existence. None surmised the real cause: at the dreadful scene of her death there were no witnesses but its cruel perpetrators; in the gloomy solitariness of mutual guilt, the deed was hatched and done.

CHAP.

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CHAP. XXIV.

A SHORT time only had elapsed since the dreadful catastrophe of the poor Signora, during which Victoria had continued, though with pining reluctance, the use of the slow poison (the Moor Zofloya having peremptorily refused to administer as yet the final dose), when, frantic with protracted hope, and increasing passion, she sought again the dark abettor of her crimes. It was on an evening, when no appointment existed between them, at an hour too much earlier than she had yet been accustomed to seek the Moor; but the demons of evil raged with such fury in her bosom, that every consideration was lost in their overpowering influence.

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influence. The wretched Berenza still lived an obstacle to her wishes, and death, death alone, could satisfy her thirsting soul.

She bent her steps towards the thickest of the forest; where the gloomy cypress, tall pine, and lofty poplar, mingled in solemn umbrage. Beyond, steep rocks, seeming piled on one another, inaccessible mountains, with here and there a blasted oak upon its summit, resembling rather, from the distant point at which it was beheld, a stunted shrub; huge precipices down, which the torrent dashed, and foaming in the viewless abyss with mighty rage, filled the most distant parts of the surrounding solitude with a mysterious murmuring, produced by the multiplied reverberations of sound.

Victoria stopped for a moment, and gazed

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gazed around; the wild gloom seemed to suit the dark and ferocious passions of her soul. She gave way to the chain of thought that came pressing on her mind, her heart was anarchy and lust of crime, and she regretted that she had suffered till now, the existence of aught between her and her desired happiness. "By the dagger's aid," thought she, "I could have accomplished all ere now. I despise, yes, despise my folly, in having deliberated so long, and the contemptible fears that have restrained my hand." Thus buoying herself up to frenzy, she admitted no reflection of danger that was attendant on the open commission of crime; her reason was blinded by the blandishments of guilt, and the despotic sway of evil that triumphed in her heart.

"Oh! Zofloya, Zofloya," she exclaimed, with wild impatience, "why art thou not

not here. Thou, perhaps, and thou alone, couldst soothe the burning madness of my brain!"

As she concluded these words, she struck her forehead violently with her hand, and threw herself with her face upon the earth.

Of a sudden the sweetest sounds stole upon her ear; they were like the tremulous vibration of a double-toned flute, sounding as it were from a distance; its lovely melody by turns softened and agitated her; it seemed not the solemn notes of the organ from the neighbouring convent; no, it was unlike mortal harmony; besides, the convent was on the other side of the castle, situated half way down a mighty rock, and she had wandered too far to catch the smallest note of its deep sounding music, even had the wind set towards

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towards the castle. Still the soft tones continued, and kept her on the rack between pain and pleasure; at one moment it brought before her view the idolized form of Henriquez, in all the grace of his youthful beauty, disposing her to love, and the most impetuous passion; the next, its melancholy cadence, suggested to her sickening soul, that him so frantically adored might never be hers; and that the barriers existing between them could never be overcome. If the turbulent emotions of her mind abated, they gave place to others no less dangerous—still she listened with resistless attention; at length a slight pause occurred.

"Sweet aërial sounds," she cried, "yet painful are the impressions I receive from you, distracting rather than soothing my troubled soul! sooner, yes sooner, would I hear the footstep of Zofloya,

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floya, or his sweet voice, sweeter than all this music."

"His voice then, and not his step! most beautiful Signora," said a voice which rivalled indeed the sweetness of the music; and Victoria beheld at her side the stately Moor.

"Astonishing being," she exclaimed, "I heard you not indeed; whence came you?"

"I am here, Victoria; will not that suffice?"

"How knew you that I desired your presence?"

"By sympathy, lovely Victoria; your very *thoughts* have power to attract me.

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Such as you have just indulged would bring me to you, from the further extremity of this terrestrial globe."

"Explain, Zofloya!"

"They are bold and spirited, they convince me that you partake of myself, and that you are worthy of my present devotion. I am satisfied in this conviction."

"But, how have you the power of divining *my* thoughts?"

Zofloya smiled, and regarded her with a piercing eye—"I can read them now, beautiful Victoria! that high-flushed cheek, that wandering eye, are evidences that cannot be mistaken."

Victoria

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Victoria sighed deeply, and concurring in the justice of the observation, inquired no further.

The wily Moor had turned her attention from his mysterious insinuations to her own conscious feelings; these alone regained full possession of her, and every thing else appeared trivial in her view.

"Oh, Zofloya!" she exclaimed, "truly dost thou divine; my soul is indeed disturbed, and unless thou wilt assist me, I am lost."

"Despair not," said the Moor, casting himself beside her, as her figure, half risen from the earth, was supported by her elbow, and her head reclined upon her hand—"Despair not," he repeated, and unrepulsed took the hand which hung down; "say but how Zofloya can serve

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his lovely mistress, and let him prove to her his zeal."

"Ah! thou knowest, thou knowest, Zofloya," she cried impatiently, when looking upon the serious, yet expressive countenance of the Moor, she more calmly proceeded: "I have hitherto, Zofloya, yielded to thy counsel; I may say, to thy will, for thou wouldst not grant me that which ere now would have set me free. Berenza still lives, still intervenes between me and happiness! Well thou knowest the feverish suspense which I endure; my blood bubbles in my heated veins, and I feel within me as if the powers of life were withering, scorched and dried up by the raging fires of my long protracted love. Oh, kind and pitying Moor, I ask thee—yes, I ask thee for that, which by ending at once the existence of him whose emaciated semblance of what he once was,

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was, reproaches, while it mocks my hopes, shall free him from the lingering torments he endures, and give new life to me!"

She paused, and looking on the Moor, beheld his eyes sparkling with such a scintillating brilliancy as it were, that she was compelled to withdraw her gaze, though impatiently she awaited his reply.

"Victoria," said he, at length, in dulcet accents, while the wild emotions of Victoria's bosom began already to subside, "I would not have thee think that in the waywardness of an unkind spirit, I refused thee thy wish; be assured thy present safety, and the ultimate attainment of thy hopes, alone actuated me. When we essayed the poison on the ancient relative of the orphan Lilla, which speedily extinguished within her the feeble flame of life, I ask thee, would

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it have been expedient, according to thy ill-judged desire, to have administered on the following day a similar draught to the Conte? What terrible and dangerous surmises would instantly have been excited, marring thereby, and putting perhaps an eternal period to all thy hopes? It was necessary that a short time at least should elapse; meanwhile, we have not lost any, for not a day hath since passed, that has not brought him nearer to his grave; because he still breathes, and faintly lives, thou believest that his breath and life are not nearly exhausted: it is not so, however; and the slightest impellant will tumble him headlong into the arms of death. Had we not first essayed the efficacy of the poison upon the old Signora, but unadvisedly had administered it to him, he would have languished for a time, and his situation would have awakened suspicion.

Now

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Now will I be sworn that success, immediate success, shall attend our attempt, and that Berenza shall die without power to express a word; depend on me then, lovely Victoria; place implicit confidence in Zofloya."

"Ah, if you are indeed anxious to serve me, Zofloya," cried Victoria, with a smile that evidenced the joy imparted by the last words of the Moor, "why did you not seek me at once, and put the speediest possible end to my protracted misery?"

"I did not seek you, because it increases my triumph and my pleasure that you should will me into your presence; with joy do I promote your wishes, but with redoubled joy when you *yourself* invite me. — Besides," added he, "I

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am almost convinced, that it would be as well even yet to delay for a time—"

"Oh, talk not to me so," interrupted Victoria, "wherefore, wherefore delay?"

"The better to evade suspicion," rejoined the Moor.

"Oh, you are bent upon destroying me, Zofloya;" when perceiving a gathering frown upon the countenance of the Moor, she hastily added——

"Oh, frown not so terribly, Zofloya, but assist me at once; thereby laying claim to my eternal gratitude, and enhancing the benefit you confer."

It shall be so then," replied the Moor, with a beautiful but peculiar smile; "I will

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will yield to your desire, assist you in your attempt, and shield you from all *immediate consequences;* this night removes from your view, one become so obnoxious to it."

"This night! saidst thou Zofloya?" cried Victoria, in an exulting voice.

"This very night," returned the Moor; "within this hour, you shall see your desire fulfilled, and I will preserve you from every danger and suspicion."

"Oh! Moor, I thank thee," exclaimed Victoria, seizing in her joy his hand, and pressing it to her bosom.

The Moor turned upon her his resplendent eyes—"Is not that heart mine, Victoria?" said he, in an impressive voice.

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"It is indeed, gratefully bound to you, Zofloya," she answered, looking upon him with a disconcerted air.

"I say it is *mine*, Victoria," returned he; "But," he added smilingly, "fear not, for I am not jealous of your passion for another."

Victoria felt surprise; she lifted her eyes to the countenance of the Moor, but they fell beneath his fiery glances—she would have spoken; she knew not what conflicting emotions chained her tongue, she desired to reprove his boldness, but needing his assistance, she durst not—she beheld herself in his power, and, in the abjectness of her guilt, she trembled.

Zofloya smiled, his hand had remained on her bosom, its hard pressure seemed heavy on her heart!——He now withdrew

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drew it, and her confused senses began to rally; she felt released, as from a grasp of iron; again she ventured to turn her eyes towards him, his features had resumed their usual expression, animated, but serene, resembling the returning brilliant calmness of a summer sky, that had looked lurid with the threatened storm. In an instant his ambiguous words vanished from the mind of Victoria, or ceased to make impression; aught was pardonable in the resistless Zofloya, and she faintly smiled.

"Victora," he observed, "it is yet light, the evening is mild and beautiful, the breeze from the mountains bears temptation on its wings, it promises delight to those in health, and reanimation to the feeble. Berenza will, I think, be induced to venture forth; leave this spot therefore, walk towards the castle,

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and you may encounter him; if you do, you will see me likewise; should Berenza be sick, let your eyes seek me; when mine meet yours, put forth your hand, and receive whatever I shall offer you; give it to Berenza, and the result will be manifested!——Farewell."

So saying, in a moment he turned, and walked rapidly away; soon Victoria beheld him no more; his movement had been so precipitate, so sudden, that scarcely could she believe she had but just beheld him. With slow and lingering steps she prepared however to depart. The words of the Moor still sounded in her ears, but their import was not clear to her; his mysterious deportment occupied her thoughts, and, though in his presence hope and pleasant feelings diffused themselves through her bosom, no sooner was he vanished than, for the temporary

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temporary calm she had experienced, accumulated horrors distracted her—the wildest phrenzy of passion, the most ungovernable hate, and thirst, even for the blood of all who might oppose her. In a mind of such gloomy anarchy, was she now traversing the forest, her pace quick, and irregular; already had she entered the path leading to the castle, when a faint and hollow voice uttered her name.

Raising her eyes, she started on beholding before her the heart-touching semblance of what he once had been; the dying, but unconscious Berenza, supported between Lilla and Henriquez; his faded form was before her indeed, but she beheld him not, for her guilty eyes were directed instantly towards his blooming brother, whose sparkling eye, and health-animated form, presented too

sure

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sure a striking contrast to the feeble being beside him. Sunk was the once brilliant eye, and robbed of its red rose teint, the pallid cheek of Berenza; despoiled of their healthful firmness, his emaciated nerveless limbs; his once expanded chest, expanded now no longer, but contracted, and oppressed by a difficulty of respiration; his elevated figure, his step bold and erect, now changed and depressed by the hard hand of long protracted suffering; the wretched Berenza retained about him no traces of what he once had been, save in the sweet suavity of his unaltered manners, save in the never dying grace that, even in a state so pitiable, accompanied his every movement. The philosophic dignity of his soul, his native strength of mind, forsook him not, but taught him, as through life it had done, to rise superior to his bodily ills—ills which even yet he vainly flattered

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tered himself were not irremediable. In the delusive fondness of Victoria's eyes he still read hope; from her well-feigned solicitude he derived consolation, and felt as though while beloved and attended by her, death could not reach him:—her love, her tenderness, seemed to him a protecting shield, through which its arrows could not pierce. Each pulsation of that faintly throbbing heart beat still with unvarying love for her; and, as he beheld her approaching, he disengaged his arm from Henriquez, and hastening towards her, even at the peril of sinking, he leaned his trembling hand upon her shoulder for support, and in an under voice he cried——

"The hope of meeting thee, my love, hath enabled me to proceed thus far. I now feel nearly overcome; lead me where for a moment I my rest myself.

"Canst

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"Canst thou walk a few paces further?" inquired Victoria, leading him onwards to the very spot where the unfortunate Signora had yielded up her life; they were then at no great distance from it, and Berenza, unable to reply, motioned that he might be supported thither.

Henriquez and Lilla joined to assist him. In a few minutes he gained the shady recess, and reposed himself upon that seat that had already been so fatal to another; passing then his arm around Victoria, he leaned his head upon her bosom.

"You are much fatigued, my love," she observed, in an anxious voice, as she sat beside him.

"Yes, my Victoria; and I would I were at the castle, for I faint with thirst."

"What

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"What wouldst thou, Berenza; I will hasten for it," said Victoria.

"Drink, drink! No matter what," answered the miserable Berenza, "something to revive my sinking soul."

"Oh, my brother!" cried Henriquez; you drink more than is prudent; and wine but increases the fever which consumes you."

"What, Henriquez!" hastily, and somewhat reproachfully, cried the agitated Berenza, rendered irritable by long suffering; "I named not wine: but if I had, wouldst thou deprive me of *every* consolation, refuse me every desire?"

Never before had the hapless Berenza expressed himself thus to a brother whom he

he tenderly loved: no sooner, therefore, did he observe that the feelings of Henriquez were wounded, than, stretching forth his hand, while a tear trembled in his eye, he said——

"Forgive me, Brother, forgive me; you do not feel as I do, nor would I have you; without wine I am a wretch; for, while it quenches the intolerable thirst which seems to parch my vitals, it warms and invigorates my debilitated frame; it gives new life to my sinking spirits, and renovates, when they begin to fail, my hopes of recovery——" Here, overcome by weakness, he could only wave his hand; which motion Henriquez comprehending, and vexed to have uttered aught that could in the smallest degree thwart his unfortunate brother, cried——

Fly,

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"Fly, my Lilla, to the castle, and bring our brother some wine; he may need my assistance, here therefore I will remain."

The beauteous Lilla bounded away to execute her mission. Berenza recovered a little; but his heart beat quick, though feebly, and his frame trembled with an increase of debility.

Lilla presently returned; "I met the Moor Zofloya," she cried, as she approached, "and he hastens now towards us with wine. I told him an overflowing goblet for *you*, my Lord;" she said, with a sweet smile, addressing Berenza—

"Did you, my little love?" said Berenza, faintly smiling, in return for her innocent attention.

Meantime, with quick step, Zofloya drew

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drew near; at sight of him violent emotion seized the breast of Victoria. Now his last words began to be explained, and she wondered in silence.

He approached and presented to the Conte the goblet of wine which he carried.

"Give it to me, my Victoria," cried Berenza; "from thy hand would I receive it," and with difficulty he raised his beating head from her bosom.

Victoria stretched forth her hand for the wine: her eyes met those of Zofloya; they were pregnant with terrible intelligence, for they spoke that *death* was in the goblet which she received from his hand.

With all her unshrinking hardihood in deeds

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deeds of horror, the strange, the dreadful expression of Zofloya's countenance shook her inmost soul: nerving her hand, however, she took, with assumed steadiness, the fatal glass, and presented it to the anxious Berenza. He raised it, fixing his hollow eyes upon her countenance; and then, looking up to Heaven, as if to call down blessings on her head, he raised it to his lips and hastily drank its contents, even to the dregs!

Scarce had he done so, ere, with convulsive motion, his hand was pressed upon his heart, that heart seized with an acute and sudden pang: yet he uttered not a word; for, while the fires of Ætna consumed his vitals, respiration was nearly arrested, and he gasped———his lips and cheeks became deadly pale, his eyes closed, his hands fell nerveless beside him, and, bereft of sense, he sunk back!.....

Who

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Who more collected than the dark Zofloya? He loosed the vest of the Conte, he rubbed his hands and his temples; and, while horror assailed Henriquez, and even the guilty Victoria felt a selfish terror at the sudden accomplishment of her own wishes, he calmly, though with seeming sorrow, expressed his idea that the Conte had fainted through excessive weakness, and would probably recover if conveyed into the castle, where proper remedies could be administered. To this remark Henriquez, though almost insensible from alarm, sadly assented; the Moor then raising in his brawny arms, him whom he well knew would never more revive, hastened with him into the house.

The lifeless Berenza being laid upon a couch, a favorite servant of the Conte's, by name Antonio, proposed instantly to go

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go in search of a certain Monk belonging to the neighbouring convent, who was reported to be highly skilled in physic and the disorders of the human frame. Henriquez, catching at the idea, hastily dispatched him, with every promise of reward, if he used expedition; and, meantime, approaching his brother, assisted Victoria and her wily coadjutor in their pretended endeavours to restore him.

That every effort was vain, is scarcely necessary to be said: yet great was the trepidation of Victoria, lest the reputed skill of the Monk, if it failed in counteracting the deadly *effects* of the poison, should at least reveal to him that poison had been resorted to. This idea threw her into a state of terror, that not all her dependence on Zofloya, nor even the offended glances of encouragement, which, from time

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time to time, he cast on her, could subdue.

After some time of excruciating anxiety, passed by all, though from different motives, Antonio at length returned. He was accompanied by a Monk indeed, but not by him whom he sought, the Reverend Father being absent from the convent on visits of charity in a distant hamlet. The one now with him was offered as his substitute, and highly recommended by the superior, as second at least to Father Anselmo in physical knowledge, and his equal in piety, charity, and good-will towards men.

The Monk approached Berenza, and, after looking at him a few moments, desired that his arm might be uncovered; then, taking his lancet from his pocket, he

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he made a small puncture in the vein. Victoria bent over him with well-feigned sorrow, while Henriquez held his motionless hand. Suddenly, (though, at the first puncture, a single drop had refused to flow,) the blood started forth, and flew in the face of Victoria!

Terror and surprise nearly overpowered the conscience-stricken wife; the avenging blood of Berenza had fixed upon his murderer, and hung its flaming evidence upon her cheek! She dared not lift her eyes, lest those of others should read in them the self-written characters of guilt; but, with trembling hand, raising a handkerchief to her face, wiped away the crimson stains, and then again ventured to bend over his lifeless form, still in terrible expectation of some further fearful event. All was over, however; the blood

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had just started, and instantly ceased; animation was not suspended merely—it was for ever fled!

No one suspecting her guilt, her agitation was attributed only to the acutely painful feelings natural to be excited by an occurrence so affecting. While the thoughts and observation of all were still engaged upon Berenza, she ventured to raise her eyes; the terrible eyes of Zofloya alone encountered hers: in them she read the desperate and gloomy fierceness of determined crime; she could not gaze upon them, but hastily looked away.

Though despairing of the smallest success, the Monk had opened a vein in the other arm of Berenza: the terrors of Victoria were renewed, but groundlessly; no life-warm current followed the lancet's point; the heart was for ever motionless, and

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and the bosom in which once it had beat high in healthful pride, inanimate and cold; hope could no more be indulged—for no swoon but the eternal sleep of death was discovered to have seized Berenza.

Such a fate, so sudden, so terrible for the best of human beings, excited bitter grief in the minds of all but Victoria. Yet even those who lamented him most, felt no surprise; for though immediate death had not been foreseen, no one had ventured to hope that it was far distant. He had not expired in the plenitude of vigorous health; his decay, on the contrary, had been progressive, though rapid, and his dissolution hastened, as Henriquez believed, by the unhappy determination of his beloved brother to refuse all medical advice, in the strange, delusive persuasion of his ever-reasoning mind, that nature must be all-sufficient to triumph

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in time over her own complaints. Never, in despite of representations most delicately urged, would Berenza give ear to any suggestions of actual danger; and for this pertinacity, Henriquez, too justly, in his mind arraigned Victoria, so tenderly beloved by the Conte; and often had he felt surprise and indignation that she never joined with others in entreating him to alter his fallacious system, when she well knew that her word, or slightest persuasion, would have changed instantly his most obstinate resolve. On the contrary, she would often argue with him, that physicians were ignorant, dangerous experimentalists, and pretend to be herself a convert to the hazardous plan of trusting all to the operations of nature. In consequence of these reflections, the heart of Henriquez involuntarily turned against the infamous wife; he had never viewed her with sentiments of regard, and she

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she was now more than unpleasing in his sight: from an unaccountable combination of ideas, he connected her so intimately with the cause of Berenza's death, by having upheld him in his mistaken notions, that he shrunk almost instinctively from her, with a sentiment of horror. Unhappy Brother! little didst thou surmise, how well, how justly founded, were the feelings of thy breast, wherein nature so powerfully asserted herself.

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CHAP. XXV.

WHEN, at a late hour, the inmates of the mansion that so late had owned Berenza for its lord, retired to their respective apartments, more to indulge in solitude their grief for his loss, than to seek repose: it chanced that Victoria, whom no feeling, however, of regret or remorse for the cruel death inflicted by her on the most excellent of human beings, deprived of the power to sleep, awakened soon after she retired to bed from a disturbed and terrifying dream. Starting up in her bed, she gazed around the chamber, still trembling under its dreadful impression. She thought that entering the apartment where the corpse of the deceased Conte reposed, she had drawn aside the cur-

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curtains of the bed, and beheld his countenance and various parts of his body discoloured and disfigured by livid marks—evidences of the poison which had been given him; that, in the frenzy of despair and terror, she had called upon and reproached Zofloya, who, without deigning to reply, gazed upon her with a stern and bitter smile. Thus, in a state of mind baffling description, she had awakened, and the impression made by her dream was so strong, that, although she endeavoured to view it only as an insignificant vision, caused by the events of the day, she found it impossible to compose herself; the figure of Berenza, discoloured by the effects of the poison, still swam in her view.

At length, determined to end what she conceived to be her superstitious terrors, she resolved to seek the apartment of the

Conte, and to satisfy herself with the conviction that her dream was without foundation, phantoms conjured merely by a diseased imagination.

Accordingly, rising from bed, she wrapped herself in a loose white dress, and took in her hand a lamp, which was burning on a marble table at the other end of the room. As she quitted her chamber, it occurred to her, that Zofloya had said he would shield her from suspicion; he might mean only with respect to having *caused* the death of the Conte; he had not expressly said, that *after* his death it should not be possible to ascertain by what means it had been occasioned. This reflection accelerated her steps, and, with pallid cheek and beating heart, she reached the room, where, in awful solitary stillness, reposed the body of the Conte. Pausing, trembling at every step, dreading

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dreading to discover she knew not what, slowly she approached the bed whereon he lay. The curtains, which were of gause, were drawn close around; still hesitating without, she endeavoured to look through them: but the outline only of the poor Berenza's form was discernible, as seen through a thin mist. Summoning resolution then, she drew the curtains apart; a slight covering still lightly veiled his countenance; desperate, fierce, she snatched it away, when, horrible confirmation of her fears, she beheld the features disfigured indeed, and frightfully changed, even to the most extravagant portraiture of her distempered fancy!— For a few moments she remained rooted to the spot; then resistlessly impelled to search for, and know the worst at once, however it might increase her consternation and despair, she opened his peaceful unconscious bosom, whereon large

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spots of livid green and blue became revealed, and struck her almost senseless with overpowering dread! not the dread of public justice, so much as the dread, horrible to her, that the discovery, or suspicion of her guilt, would prevent, *before* death, the accomplishment of her criminal wishes, rendering thereby useless and unavailing the enormities she had atchieved for their sake.

These ideas glanced rapidly through her mind; she still remained by the side of the bed, gazing upon the placid though discoloured features of him she had destroyed, and which, had she been susceptible of compunctious feeling, spoke in their mournful fixedness a thousand reproaches on her guilt. But no, her thoughts were employed upon the consequences likely to ensue to herself; the hour of morning began to approach, and her

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her heart beat with increased alarm, at the idea of the surmises that must soon be excited by the altered appearance of the Conte. The terrible Inquisition!—its horrid torments, its lynx-eyed scrutiny, pressed upon her brain—at this juncture she thought of Zofloya; a faint hope that he might assist her in the present confusion of her ideas, determined her to apply to him—yet how to seek him? and at this hour how could she, to the presumptuous Moor, excuse the indecorum of summoning him?

These reflections, unworthy however the masculine spirit of a Victoria, she speedily overcame, in the stronger sense of her embarrassment, and she decided to seek him instantly. She knew that his apartment was situated near that of Henriquez, and cautiously she left the

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silent chamber of death, and retraced her steps along the darksome gallery, dimly illumined only by the lamp she held, and which served to guide her steps. As she was slowly proceeding, a ray from her lamp fell suddenly upon the sparkling vest of Zofloya, and partially betrayed his towering figure to her view.

"I was seeking you; I need your advice; hasten onwards, I pray," in a low voice entreated Victoria, too rejoiced to have encountered him, to feel surprise at his unexpected appearance.

"Lead on then," replied the Moor, "I am obedient."

Victoria

Victoria laid her finger on her lip, and turned back towards the chamber of the Conte; the contrast between them, as they moved along, was peculiarly forcible; the figure of Victoria, slender and elegantly proportioned, arrayed in flowing white, with her raven hair streaming over her shoulders; that of Zofloya so gigantic, and differently attired, yet seeming at intervals, by the dubious rays of the lamp, and the effect of strong shade, increased to a height scarcely human. Once or twice, the deceptive magnitude of his dark shadow on the wall, struck with momentary alarm even the hardy Victoria, and might have excited remark, but that other objects engrossed too deeply her present thoughts.

They now reached the peaceful gloomy chamber of Berenza. "Enter, Zofloya," whispered

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whispered Victoria, and approach that bed."

The Moor obeyed.

" Open the curtains, and gaze upon the countenance within."

The Moor opened the curtains, and looked upon the face of Berenza; then turning immediately to Victoria, the expression of his features, (though less malignant and severe,) reminded her forcibly of her dream.

" Tell me, Moor," she exclaimed, rendered desperate by her feelings of terror, and grasping with violence the arm of Zofloya, " tell me, what can be done in this terrible extremity?"

The Moor was silent.

" Didst

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"Didst thou not tell me," pursued Victoria, "thou wouldst preserve me from suspicion? Behold those blackened features, that discoloured bosom; who can fail immediately to ascertain that poison—poison hath caused the death of Berenza?"

"Whoever beholds the Conte will clearly ascertain that fact," coolly replied the Moor.

"Zofloya, Zofloya!" cried Victoria, gasping with terror, "what is that you say?"

"I say, beautiful Victoria, whoever sees the Conte, will instantly pronounce, that his death was caused by poison!"

Victoria clasped her hands, and remained

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mained mute with consternation and anguish, fixing her regards upon the Moor.

"Victoria!" he cried at length, "if you would have *my* services, I repeat, what I have often urged, you must place *implicit confidence* in me, and firm reliance; retire now to your chamber, and fear nothing for the morrow!"

"But, Berenza——"

"Leave to me all care for your safety."

"But, those marks!"

The Moor knit his dark brows—"I have *said*," he cried, in a stern authoritative voice, and pointed haughtily to the door.

The

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The frame of Victoria trembled, and she retreated towards the door. Horror and awe, at the inexplicable character of the Moor, so wholly possessed her, that though she longed, she durst not require an explanation of his intentions with respect to the body of Berenza. His dark but brilliant eyes, like two stars in a gloomy cloud, pursued her with their strong imperious rays, even to the threshold of the door; she stopped, hesitated, and attempted to speak, but the effort was vain; and without power to offer resistance, she quitted the apartment.

Great alternately were the terrors, and great the hopes of Victoria. On the word of the Moor she had strong reliance, for she had never yet found that he deceived her; but his ambiguous promises, his explicit acknowledgment, that whoever saw the body of the Conte must dis-

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discover the occasion of his death, threw her again into fits of doubt and consternation; and the hours that she passed in her chamber, expecting every moment some confirmation of her fears, were the just portion of one immersed like herself in blackest guilt.

The morning was not far advanced, when a mingled commotion, and confusion of voices, pervaded the castle; the terrors of conscious criminality prevented her from rising to inquire the cause. Fainting, almost dying, she awaited the result, while cold drops of agony gemmed her writhing brow. At length a loud knocking at her chamber door caused her to start from her seat: the blood flew into her lately pallid cheeks, and as suddenly rushed back to her heart, leaving them again of a livid paleness. The knocking continued: more dead than alive,

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alive, she tottered to the door, and opened it; various persons, domestics in the castle, burst into the room; strong dismay painted on their faces, and with loud lamentation exclaimed, that the *body of the Conte was missing ! !*



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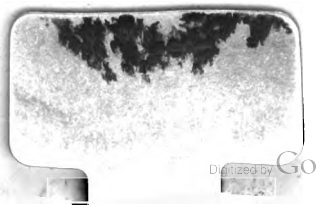
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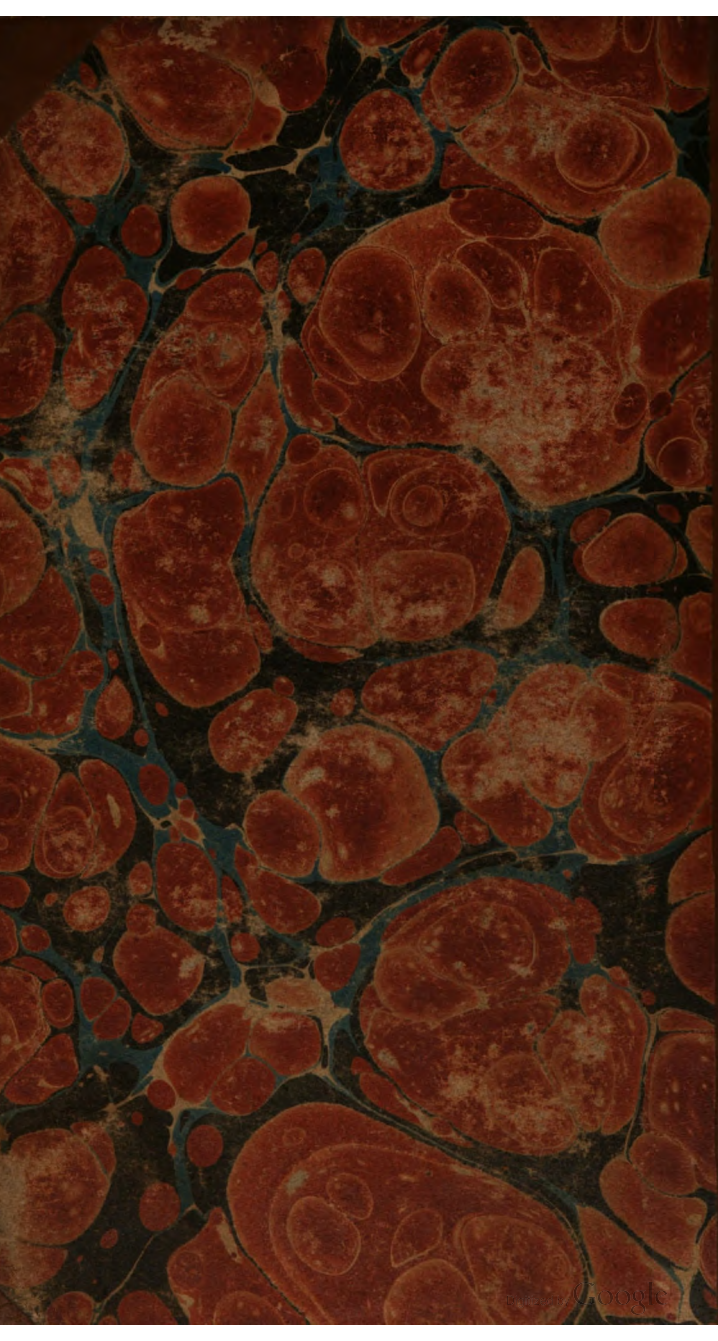
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